Keeping It Together by BimeyMooMimey

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Just a cute story about Mike and Will.

1. Let's Not Talk About That

Author's Note:

> Hey everyone, first story on here so be gentle. If enough people like this I can continue it, I have a general idea of where I want to go with it. Overall there won't be anything too deep here, just some nice fluff for everyone. Because we all need fluff every now and then, don't we? Anyway, let me know what you think, comments are appreciated. Hope you all like it :)

Will Byers was on his way to Hawkins Middle School, his bike gliding across the side of the road as if he was riding on air. A cool breeze was blowing against his face and for some peculiar reason he could not for the life of him get rid of this stupid smile from his face. Maybe, he thought to himself, it had something to do with the fact that his best friend, Mike Wheeler, was riding alongside him.

Mike Wheeler, the nerdy boy with freckles whom he had first met during the second grade. Will had always known that there had been something special about Mike, although he had never known exactly what had gravitated himself towards the Wheeler boy. Until fairly recently, that is. Ever since he realized that he liked, as in, *like* liked Mike, he was all he could possibly ever think about.

Although even saying that was a little dishonest. No, Will Byers was in love with this boy.

“What are you smiling about?” Mike asked him as he rode next to him, and Will noticed a tinge of amused curiosity in his voice.

Will figured that he was blushing fiercely, and he turned his eyes back to the road. “Nothing,” he mumbled quickly, although the smile on his face grew a little wider. For reasons he couldn’t explain, he always loved it when Mike asked him questions about himself, even pointless questions like what he was smiling at. It showed that Mike at least cared about him, adding him to a not-very-big list of people for Will. Although from Mike, it made him feel particularly special.

They approached the school and put their bikes on the rack, meeting up with his other good friends Dustin and Lucas. As Will Byers entered the school and headed towards his locker, he could not stop smiling. And when he looked over at his friend as he was walking through the hall, he could see that Mike was smiling at him too. He was giving Will that goofy grin that always made him giggle. The grin that told him that today would be a good day.

“Byers!” shouted a voice from the end of the hall. Will froze, his mood changing in an instant from delight to fright. It almost felt like his body was forcing itself to turn around to face his tormentor: Troy.

Will wasn’t able to get a word out, and just stood there, paralyzed in fear. The hall had gotten a lot quieter all of a sudden. “What’s the matter, fairy?” Troy sneered. “Peter Pan got your tongue?”

Will merely exhaled, unable to speak or move. Why couldn’t he move?! What was wrong with him? *Outside of, of course, everything*, Will thought pessimistically to himself. After all, Troy wasn’t wrong. He was a fairy, a queer. And one who had a massive crush on his best friend, no less.

As if he had been listening to Will’s internal despair, Troy’s face lit up in sadistic glee. “I know your secret, Byers,” Troy cooed, taking pleasure in Will’s pain. “You actually are a queer.” Will’s mouth was left agape in surprise and horror as Troy continued to mock him. “You are! And you’re in love with Frogface!”

Will felt his heart stop. His paralysis suddenly broke, and he quickly turned around to his friends to try to convince them it wasn’t true. But he could see it on their faces. They knew. Lucas and Dustin both looked awkwardly at the ground, almost as if they were embarrassed to be even near him. And Mike…

Mike was staring at Will with a face he couldn’t exactly describe. It was one of betrayal, combined with disgust. It didn’t make him feel warm and fuzzy inside, like he usually felt when Mike looked at him. Instead, it filled him with sorrow. It filled him with a feeling that nothing would ever be okay again.

“Mike…” Will let out, desperately wanting to explain everything to

him. Or, at the very least, a lie that would alleviate his pain. Anything to stop his friend from hating him. But Mike wasn't there to listen. Instead, he turned around and walked away from him. "Mike!" Will yelled as the tears that were already brewing in his eyes began falling down. "Mike!" He began sobbing pitifully. He deserved this. He glanced hopelessly back at Mike as he walked away. Will shut his eyes tightly, hoping that this was just a really bad dream.

"Will!" A voice jolted Will awake, and his eyes shot open. It was dark but as his eyes adjusted, he saw who had said his name: Mike.

He was in Mike's basement for a sleepover. They had spent the night playing Dungeons and Dragons with Dustin and Lucas, although they had gone earlier due to it being a school night. Will had begged his mother on the phone to let him stay the night, and after a minute of promising to go to bed at a reasonable time she had said yes. Of course, however, they had stayed up watching Star Wars in the basement, and once it was over they were both too tired to go upstairs so they decided to sleep in the basement. It had been a perfect night.

And now, Mike was hovering over Will with a concerned look on his face. Will noticed the feeling of wet tears on his face. That's when he remembered: the dream. Even thinking about it triggered a new flow of tears, and Will put a hand over his eyes to try to hide them.

"Hey," Mike whispered soothingly, bringing Will into a hug. Will trembled in his arms, although his embrace gave him some comfort. "I-it's okay," Mike said as he hugged Will, who was leaning into him.

After a little while, Mike pulled away as Will sniffed a little, already feeling a considerable amount better. He wiped away the tears on his face as he offered Mike a small smile of gratitude. "You have a nightmare?" Mike asked. "I heard you mumbling and moving around

when you were asleep."

Will nodded weakly, instantly feeling bad that he had woken him up. "I'm sorry," Will said.

"It's okay!" Mike told him quickly. "I was already awake, and I wouldn't mind anyway." Mike gave him a smile, which made Will smile back almost immediately. "Why were you, um…I mean, you want to talk about it?" he asked.

Will's face fell. Of course, part of him did want to tell Mike about the nightmare. More than that, he wanted to tell him about everything. His fears, his struggles with his sexuality, and most importantly that he liked…no, *loved* Mike Wheeler. But he couldn't. He had already thought of a million different possible reactions Mike would have, and most of them were bad. His dream had been just one example of that. This paralyzed him from saying anything.

"It wasn't anything important," Will managed to let out, turning away from Mike. He could see Mike out of the corner of his eye staring at him with a concerned look on his face. Will felt his face burn, but he hoped that the cover of darkness would help hide his blush.

"Will…" Mike started to say, his brow furrowing.

"Mike, seriously, it doesn't matter," Will said, forcing a smile and looking back at his friend. He knew that if Mike kept pressing, he would probably be unable to not slip out an answer. It would be best for both of them if this conversation ended. "Why don't we go back to sleep, huh?"

Mike sighed and nodded. "Okay…but, um, if you want to talk, just know I'm here for you, ok?" he said.

Will bit his lip. "Thanks," he said. Truth be told, there was nothing more that he wanted to do than to talk about everything he was dealing with. Mike wanted to help, and Will knew that part of him needed to be helped too. Before he could restrain himself anymore, he asked him a question that had been plaguing him since he had woken up. "Mike, what would it take for you to hate me?"

Will immediately hated himself for asking the question, and cursed himself for his impulsiveness. What was he thinking? What type of question was that to ask a best friend? He could see Mike blink a couple times in response, still processing the question. He quickly tried to backtrack. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t, I-I…” he stuttered, trying to take it back. “Just f-forget I said anything, le--”

“Will Byers, look at me.” Mike interrupted, taking Will’s hands firmly in his own. “There is nothing that you could do to ever make me hate you.” Mike said, staring Will directly in the eyes. “Never.” He repeated as he drew Will into a tight hug, wrapping up the smaller boy in his arms. Mike also punched his arm lightly. “Don’t ever ask a stupid question like that again,” he scolded firmly yet warmly.

Will, caught completely off guard by his reaction, giggled at the last comment. “Sorry. Won’t happen again,” Will sighed happily, resting his chin on Mike’s shoulder and hugging him back. A hug from Mike always felt like a special occasion, and this was no exception. He felt warm butterflies swarming in his chest, not only from Mike holding him but also from his response. It made him feel special, just like when Mike smiled at him. It made him feel loved, even if it wasn’t necessarily in the way Will loved him back.

Maybe he does, a tiny voice in Will’s head said to him.

Will pulled away from Mike, giving him one last, warm smile. “Thanks, Mike,” he said quietly.

“Anytime,” Mike replied, grinning at him. This only made Will blush even more. “Now, let’s get some sleep, ok?”

Will nodded, lying back down. “G’night, Mike,” he said, closing his eyes.

“Good night, Will,” Mike replied as Will heard him lie back down as well.

The majority of Will’s brain couldn’t help but be pessimistic towards his chances with Mike. He had no idea if Mike was even into boys at all, and even if he was, why would he go for a scrawny, nervous wreck like himself? But the fact that Will had kept a crush on him at

all meant that there was also a small optimistic voice, no matter how tiny, that told him that there could be a chance. That he deserved love and Mike Wheeler could be the one who loved him. Most of the time, this small voice was pummeled by the rest of his brain deep into his subconscious, beaten and bruised to the point where it was almost insignificant.

But the way Mike had cared for Will tonight made the voice reappear, and it gave him hope. Even if it was only a little hope, it was enough to shake away the nightmare and his anxieties for the time being, and close his eyes with a smile.

Will Byers slept peacefully for the rest of that night.

2. Keep It To Yourself

Michael Wheeler couldn't sleep that night. He kept on tossing and turning in his sleeping bag, trying to force his eyes closed in an effort to get some rest, but nothing was working. In the dark, he stared up at the ceiling with open eyes. He felt warm all over. It wasn't just that it was somewhat warm in the basement, because it was. It was May in Hawkins, after all.

But no, it was likely because Mike was thinking about Will Byers, the young boy sleeping on the couch mere feet away from him. Will had always given him a weird, warm feeling whenever he thought about him, although it was probably amplified now that the two were sleeping in the same room. It was hard for Mike to describe.

Well, it was hard for Mike to describe pretty much anything regarding Will lately. That was the main reason he couldn't go to sleep. Despite the busy day he had spent earlier playing dungeons and dragons with Lucas, Dustin, and Will, and then the later evening with just Will, he felt his brain running at full capacity. For the life of him, he could not get the young Byers boy off of his mind.

Mike turned on his side, facing Will. He appeared to be sleeping peacefully, which made Mike smile. He wasn't sure exactly when it started, but Will had been making him smile a lot more recently. He had obviously had crushes before, but never this strong. And never on a boy. That was what probably made this a much more difficult crush than any other time in Mike's life. He had heard his parents talk about queers as if they were disgusting, or somehow less than people. It was mainly his dad who said these things, but his mother never disagreed with him when he did. He knew that if he told them, it wouldn't go well.

Will was another story. Mike had no idea how he would react if he told him about his newly-discovered attraction for boys, and in particular his attraction to that specific boy. Will might accept him, but at the same time Mike felt that things between them might be… awkward, to say the least. He didn't know if what the idiots like Troy said about his friend at school were true, but even if they were, why would someone like Will like someone like him?

Mike was confused about everything. What he should feel, what he should say, and what he *wanted* to feel and *wanted* to say. Though looking at Will helped calm his thoughts a bit.

“Mike…” Mike was jolted from his train of thought when he heard his name. He looked at Will. Did he just say his name? Maybe he was just imagining things. It looked like he was asleep. Mike knew that Will had sometimes mumbled in his sleep, so it was probably nothing.

“Mike,” Will let out again, this time getting his full attention. Will’s voice came out sad and almost strangled, even if still somewhat quiet. Mike quickly got up and rushed over to his friend. “Will?” he asked cautiously.

“Mike!” Will cried out in his sleep. Even in the dark, Mike could see that Will was crying. His mind shifted from a state of concern and confusion to one of panic in an instant as he knew that he needed to wake up Will immediately.

“Will!” Mike said loudly, grabbing his arm. Will’s eyes sprung open, and for a moment Mike was relieved. Their eyes matched for a moment as Will breathed heavily, getting over the shock of waking up. But as Mike saw him get his bearings, he only looked more and more sad until Will started crying again, lifting a hand to his eyes to try to hide it from him.

“Hey…i-it’s okay,” Mike said, pulling Will into a hug. The next twenty minutes were spent trying to comfort his young friend. It wasn’t the first time he had seen Will upset, but this time seemed different from the others. Mike hated seeing him like this. It made him want to cry himself, but he knew that he needed to stay strong for Will. He tried to ask what the nightmare was about, but when it became clear to him that Will didn’t want to talk about it, he decided to stop prying. He also decided to not mention him hearing Will say his name before waking up. Although it pained him to not know what was going on with his friend.

What pained him more, however, was the question he got from Will soon afterwards: “what would it take for you to hate me?” The question had shocked Mike and also made him very sad that Will

would even consider this a possibility. Mike could *never* hate him. Even if Will had done something unbelievably cruel to him, which Mike knew he wouldn't do, he still could never bring himself to hate him. It was Will Byers. As Mike held him tightly, he hoped that he was able to convey that to him in the best possible way he could.

But even as he lied back down after having sufficiently calmed Will, Mike still felt uneasy. He didn't like seeing his friend in this much pain. At that moment, Mike Wheeler made a private decision: his personal feelings for Will wouldn't matter. Even if Will had mumbled his name in his sleep, it probably didn't mean what Mike wanted it to mean. It didn't matter. What mattered was Will. For now, he had one goal: protect Will Byers at all costs.

Mike was able to get a few hours of sleep afterwards, although he still couldn't stop thinking about Will throughout the night. It was Will who woke him up in the morning, nudging him gently. Mike noticed that he seemed significantly happier than the night before, which made Mike happy too.

The two snuck upstairs to get ready for the day to avoid a lecture from his mother. If she had found them sleeping in the basement, Mike knew she would almost surely get at them for staying up late on a school night. Thankfully, no one brought it up during breakfast, and despite his sleepy demeanor, Mike thought he had been able to successfully convince his mother that they *hadn't* spent the night watching Star Wars.

"There's no *way* she bought that!" Will laughed as he rode on his bike alongside Mike on the way to school. He was in a chipper and playful mood, which, given the events of the previous night, made Mike beyond thankful.

"Sure she did! If she knew we stayed up late, why didn't she get at us

then?" Mike grinned playfully, glancing at his friend through the corner of his eye. It was a particularly breezy day, which made Will's hair blow gracefully in the wind. He tried not to stare at it too long or else he feared that he might abandon his attention of the road altogether.

"No, she'll definitely get at you. She just didn't do it while *I* was there because she likes me!" Will said teasingly.

"That's because everyone likes you, Byers, you're impossible to dislike," Mike replied in a joking yet sincere way as they approached the school, slowing their bikes. Will flashed Mike a shy but large smile that nearly made his heart melt.

Mike and Will approached the bike rack, setting their bikes down. Despite the wind from the ride to school doing a little bit to wake him up, Mike let out a yawn. He was still very tired.

"How much sleep did you get last night?" Will asked, causing Mike to turn over to him and lean on the bike rack.

He shrugged. "Doesn't matter," he said.

Will looked down at the ground. Mike could tell that he wanted to ask something. "Last night you said that you were already awake when I…you know…" he trailed off, looking at Mike with uncertainty. Mike nodded with understanding, prompting him to continue. "Why were you up so late?" Will asked.

Mike sighed. He promised himself last night that no matter what, Will must come first. He didn't want to burden his friend with his confusion over his sexuality, let alone his feelings for him. Although it hurt to lie to him, he knew he couldn't tell him.

"I don't know," Mike said, shrugging again, "it was pretty hot in the basement. That made it hard for me to sleep."

Apparently, it wasn't a very good lie, because Will gave him a sideways glance and a bemused expression. "Michael Wheeler, don't lie to me," Will said, crossing his arms.

"You sound like my mom," Mike smirked, causing Will to giggle. He

playfully punched Mike in the arm. “How about I’ll tell you what I was thinking about last night if you tell me what your nightmare was about?” He said, not really being serious.

Will’s amused smile quickly turned into an anxious frown, and he looked back down at his feet. Shit. Mike immediately knew he had said the wrong thing. “I was just joking, you don’t have to,” Mike said quickly, an embarrassed blush forming on his face as he was tripping over his own words. “It’s really okay, I-”

“It was about Troy,” Will let out, looking at Mike with sad and scared eyes. A silence fell between the two of them. Will looked away from Mike as he processed what he just said. “He…I dunno, he said some really mean stuff, and then you guys…you, Dustin, and Lucas I mean…took his side, I guess?” Will’s voice became shaky as Mike heard him sniffle. “I felt like I lost you guys…” Will’s head turned back to Mike, but he was still facing the ground. That didn’t stop Mike from seeing the tears that were falling from his face.

As he described his dream in more and more detail, Mike’s expression turned from one of apprehension to one of deep pain. No wonder Will had been so mortified after waking up. He knew that Will put his friends above everyone else, and Mike himself couldn’t imagine what he would do if he would lose any of them. Especially Will.

Mike pulled Will into a tight hug as he tried to soothe his friend, wrapping his arms around the smaller boy’s torso. He trembled in his arms, but returned the hug. Mike was about to go into a spiel similar to the one he did last night, that he could never hate him, that he would never do anything to hurt him, and so on. But then he thought of something more meaningful. Even if he didn’t feel like he could tell Will everything, he might be able to tell Will a little bit to make him feel appreciated and loved.

“You want to know why I couldn’t sleep last night?” Mike asked him. Will pulled a little bit away from him, looking up at him and nodding. Mike smiled. “I was thinking about you. And how awesome of a friend you are. I had a lot of fun last night, and…I don’t know, I just couldn’t stop thinking about it. You’re my best friend, Will. I lo-” Mike nearly choked on his own words, quickly thinking of a good way to save himself. “I love hanging out with you. And I just couldn’t

stop thinking about how lucky I am to have you in my life."

Will smiled up at Mike. "Really?"

"Yes, really," Mike said, smiling back at him. It wasn't the whole truth, but it was certainly part of it. "If you think for a second that I would ever take sides with a mouthbreather like Troy against you, then you're being stupid. I would never abandon you. And neither would Dustin or Lucas."

"Thanks," Will said, sniffling and wiping away a couple remaining tears. He pulled away from Mike, an action which he understood but also left him feeling disappointing and aching for more. *Don't think like that, you idiot, you need to be a friend right now,* Mike thought to himself. He had revealed a little bit, but not too much. "Speaking of which, where are they?" Will said, interrupting Mike's internal scolding of himself.

"Oh, Dustin and Lucas?" Mike asked. "Probably already inside arguing about who gets to keep the next X-Men comic," he said, smirking. He jerked his head towards the school doors. "Why don't we head in?"

"Not so fast, Frogface!" said a voice from behind them. Mike and Will whirled around to see Troy, accompanied by his crony James. *Great, just what Will needs,* Mike thought, glaring at the sadistic boys walking up to them. Both of them had amused and sinister expressions on their face.

Mike glanced at Will, whose face had gone a ghostly shade of white. He clenched his fist. Will had been through enough, he would deal with this. "What do you want, Troy?" Mike said harshly, stepping up to face him.

"Seems like you and the fairy were having a little pow-wow," Troy sneered at him. "I'm surprised you two didn't kiss." James chortled, donning a shit-eating grin that made Mike seethe with anger.

"Mike, let's go…" Mike heard Will say quietly from behind him, but he was already facing Troy. It was too late to back down.

“Don’t call him that,” Mike demanded, glaring at the both of them. “You don’t know the first thing about him.”

“I know he’s a stupid queer,” Troy said angrily. “And judging from the way I saw you two freaks holding each other just now, I’m thinking that he’s converted you too.”

“Shut up!” Mike said, anger boiling up inside of him. His fist trembled as it tightened even more.

“Or what? What are you gonna do?” A sadistic smirk spread across Troy’s face as he glanced over to James. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he converted Midnight and Toothless too. That’s the problem with fairies. They keep on sprinkling their fairy dust over everyone until they’re all infected. That’s why you have to exterminate them like pests before they start spreading their diseases. That way, you don’t have to worry about being--”

Troy was never able to finish his sentence, however, because Mike decided that he had had enough and punched him in the face.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hope you liked this chapter! Be sure to leave comments if you would like more, any feedback is very much appreciated. I'll probably switch perspectives between Mike and Will a bit more frequently within chapters in the future, but I thought it would be nice to do a chapter from Will's point of view to start off and then Mike's for one chapter just to ground this story. I'm not sure exactly how long this is going to be, but hopefully you will enjoy what I have in store for you guys in the next few chapters. Thanks for reading :)
>
> Also please forgive any grammar mistakes, I have finals to stress about so go easy on me :p

3. Feeling Unworthy

Time seemed to slow for Will as soon as he had heard Troy's voice. His lips became dry once he saw him and James approach them. He wanted to turn away, he wanted to grab Mike and run, but he was frozen in place. Just like in his dream. He felt powerless as Troy mocked them…well, mocked *him*. What Troy said stung like a hornet's nest. Despite Mike reassuring him only moments earlier that he valued their friendship, Troy made Will feel unworthy of that friendship. Not only with Mike, but with Dustin and Lucas too. And all he could do was stand there stupidly as Troy berated them once again.

That is, until Mike punched Troy in the face. Will's jaw dropped, and from the look on Troy's face from when he stumbled back and fell, he seemed shocked too. But Mike stood his ground, clenching his fist and looking down at the bully. James, Will noticed, had wiped that stupid smirk off of his face and was now looking at them with fear.

As time quickened back to a normal pace, Troy's expression shifted from one of shock to one of anger. "You're dead, Wheeler!" he snarled, getting up and lunging at Mike. Troy punched him in the eye, sending him sprawling. The two wrestled fiercely on the ground as Will could only look on. James had run away.

"Mike, stop!" Will cried, tears brimming in his eyes. "Please!" He didn't like violence in any form. No matter how satisfying it felt to see Mike punch him, no one deserved to be hurt. Not even Troy. And especially not Mike.

Thankfully, Will didn't need to intervene further, as a teacher came briskly strolling onto the scene from the parking lot. Will breathed a sigh of relief as he approached, but then stiffened when he realized who it was. It was Mrs. Logan, the kids' English teacher. The one teacher who always seemed to have it out for him and his friends.

"Just what is going on here?" she demanded in a stern tone, causing Mike and Troy to pause and quickly move away from one another.

"He hit me!" Troy said defensively, pointing at Mike.

Mrs. Logan stared daggers at Mike. “Is this true?”

Mike put his hands in his pockets, looking down at the ground. Knowing Mike as well as he did, Will knew that he probably wouldn’t say anything in response. He just had a scowl on his face, glaring sideways at Troy.

“Fine. Then you boys can come with me, I’m taking you to the principal,” Mrs. Logan said sharply, harshly grabbing Mike by the wrist. Will saw Mike flinch in pain, causing a rush of deep concern to flow through him.

“Mrs. Logan, shouldn’t he go to the nurse?” Will interjected desperately.

The teacher froze, hand still gripped on Mike’s wrist. She turned towards him, staring Will coldly in the eyes in a way that made him shudder. She glanced at Troy, who was rubbing the bruise on his face. “Troy, you can go to the nurse,” she said. “Byers, you’re coming with me.”

Will shivered, afraid to say anything because he knew he would likely cry, silently nodded and hid his eyes away from her glare. He knew that Mrs. Logan was the type of teacher to pick out a few students and make life miserable for them. Not only that, but he also knew that she had a particular liking for Troy. Maybe it was because she agreed with Troy about him. Maybe she knew what he really was, Will thought with a shudder. Dejectedly, he followed Mrs. Logan and Mike to the school doors and to the principal’s office.

Needless to say, the meeting did not go well. Mrs. Logan immediately took the opportunity to frame the situation as negatively as she could for Mike, and even painted Will as a guilty bystander. Will supposed that this was true, but Will felt guiltier for not acting earlier to protect Mike, rather than protecting someone like Troy. Although he would have had preferred that the situation never happened in the first place.

“Mrs. Logan, maybe it would be best if we had Troy in here too,” Principal Thomas began to say, looking over Mike, “he seems to have quite a few bruises himself. This just looks like a schoolyard fight to

me."

"It seemed pretty clear to me that it was in self-defense. Wheeler dealt the first blow." Mrs. Logan responded.

The principal sighed, turning towards Mike. "Is this true? Did you punch Troy first?"

Mike glared down at his feet. "Yes," he said sullenly. "But Troy isn't innocent in this either. He was picking on Will and it was unwarranted." Not for the first time since he had entered the office, Will felt a pang of guilt.

"Well, Michael, I must be frank, playground insults don't really amount to physical violence," the principal replied in a serious manner. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to suspend you for the rest of the week. I'm going to call your mother to come pick you up." He turned his gaze over to Will. "I presume that you did not partake in any violence, Mr. Byers?"

Will gulped. "N-n-no, sir," he stuttered out.

Satisfied, Principal Thomas nodded in reply. "Fair enough. I'm letting you off with a warning then. Go help Michael clean up before his mother picks him up." With that, he dismissed them, and out of the corner of his eye Will thought he caught a smug grin on Mrs. Logan's face. That made him feel all kinds of nasty feelings, and for a moment he felt like he understood exactly why Mike had punched Troy.

Will sat with Mike on the curb outside of the school. He had helped take care of Mike a little bit in the nurse's office, such as putting a couple bandages and giving him an icepack to help with the bruising. But Mike still had a few scrapes and small bruises from the tussle with Troy and one hell of a black eye. Will was still somewhat sick to his stomach from the whole ordeal, so thought that he might as well keep Mike company as he waited for his mom to pick him up. Who

knew, maybe he would be able to help calm her before she went completely ballistic at Mike for getting suspended. It was the least he could do.

Will still felt bad about everything that happened. They hadn't really talked much since exiting the principal's office, and even now they were just sitting in silence. But Will knew he needed to say something.

He turned over to his bruised friend, opening his mouth to speak. "Mike, I--"

"You don't need to say it," Mike said, looking down at his feet. "I know what you're gonna say anyway. You're going to tell me that I shouldn't have done that. That I shouldn't have punched Troy, that it was a stupid move."

Will sighed, somewhat hurt by the bluntness in Mike's voice but also relieved that he had said what he wanted him to say. "Mike, you *know* I don't like violence…" Will started to say.

"Yeah, I know. And I'm sorry about that." Mike was still staring at the ground, not looking at Will. "But I don't regret doing it."

Will cast Mike a worried and confused look. "What?"

Mike turned to look directly at Will, and Will suddenly became quite aware of how close they were to each other. "I did what I did to protect you. Troy said some horrible shit, and I wasn't going to just stand there and let him get away with it. Not this time. No one deserves to be treated like that by anyone. Not Dustin, not Lucas, and especially not you."

"Mike…" Will said, feeling even more guilt wade through him. Mike had done this for *him*. He had punched Troy and got suspended for Will freaking Byers. The boy that no one was supposed to care about. Will immediately felt undeserving of that. "I…I don't need your protection."

"Well, too bad, because you're going to get it," Mike said, giving him a little smile. The type of smile that made Will's heart light on fire,

and despite the severity of the situation made him smile back. Damn it. He was supposed to be scolding Mike right now, but he just couldn't stop looking at his face. Despite the black eye, Michael Wheeler was still as beautiful as ever; in fact, from Will's perspective, it even made him even more beautiful. Not that the black eye was a particularly good feature, but it helped contrast the ugliness in the world that had caused it with the beauty that Will knew Mike possessed. His perfect freckles, his messy hair, his dark eyes that seemed to pierce his soul, his lips…god, his lips. What he wouldn't give to…

Will forced himself to snap out of his reverie, or else he feared his actions might catch up to his thoughts. He turned his head towards the ground before looking back at Mike, although he still couldn't wipe that goofy grin off of his face. "Fine," he said in resignation, earning himself an even wider smile from Mike. Will felt himself almost get lost in that one as well, but he forced himself to get it together. "But no more violence. I'm serious. We beat them by taking the high ground, not stooping to their level."

Mike nodded, understanding. "You're right. No more violence," Mike repeated, and Will breathed a sigh of relief. "But I can't do nothing. I have to respond when Troy says those bad things about you. I don't want you to worry about him spreading lies about you anymore."

And that's when time seemed to stop for Will again. He froze, replaying Mike's last sentence over and over again in his head. "Lies." Troy had almost certainly been wrong about Mike, Dustin, and Lucas. Although the thing was, what Troy said about Will was right. He was a fairy, a queer. Troy knew, but Mike didn't. And suddenly, Will's heart tore in two. The voice in his head that told him that maybe, just *maybe*, there was a chance for him and Mike had vanished altogether. Mike didn't know who he was…*what* he was.

"Will?" He heard Mike say. "You okay, man?"

He was anything but okay. He felt worthless all over again. Mike only protected him because he thought Will was just a regular kid, not some freak that was in love with his best friend. If Will had felt mildly undeserving of everything he had with Mike before, he was now fully convinced of it. He was unworthy of Mike's protection, his

dedication, his friendship. It didn't matter what Mike said; he didn't know the truth. If he knew, then everything he had said about Will, about never possibly hating him, about always being there for him, about valuing his friendship more than anything…it would all mean nothing.

Will opened his mouth to say something, but was afraid of whatever was going to come out. He felt fresh tears forming in his eyes. He couldn't let Mike see him like this, or else everything would come crashing down. "Will?" Mike said again.

"I-I-I have to g-go…" Will stuttered out, getting up. He hid his eyes away, too scared to see Mike's reaction. "I'm sorry…" he said as he quickly walked away from him.

"Will, wait!" He heard Mike say, and for a moment he was worried that he would follow him. But then Will heard the sound of an approaching car, and then in quick succession the sound of a very upset Mrs. Wheeler calling Mike. Under any other circumstance, Will might have found it somewhat amusing to hear Mike's Mom rail on him, but for now he was too sad to react. He needed to be alone.

Will felt a steady flow of tears fall from his face as he went into the school and quickly hid himself into a bathroom stall. He didn't know how much longer he was able to keep this up before he suddenly snapped. The guilt and fear was becoming too much to bare. He needed to tell someone about his feelings for Mike.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Sorry that this is a sad chapter, it is necessary :(The next chapter will be much better. I'm thinking that this will likely be around 6 or 7 chapters. I'm really enjoying writing this, so it may be longer but we'll see.
>
> Thank you all so much for the great comments! I always love hearing from people who read this. Let me know what you think of this new chapter! :)

4. Confessions and Comfort

Mike watched Will as he ran off, desperately wanting to follow him. No matter how hard Will tried to hide the tears, Mike knew when his friend was crying. He got up, but then saw out of the corner of his eye his mother's car pulling up. *Shit*, he thought silently to himself. Unfortunately, he somewhat doubted that he would be able to get out of this one.

The car stopped in front of him, with his mother rolling the window down and looking very sternly at him. "In. Now." Mike took one glance back to see if Will was still there. He wasn't. He sighed, knowing that he didn't really have a choice anyway. He climbed into the passenger seat of the car, closing the door behind him. The car sped away as Mike looked at the school forlornly through the window.

"Is that a black eye?" his mother asked, with an air of both concern and annoyance. Despite Will's best efforts to clean him up, he wasn't able to get rid of it. Groaning internally, Mike shrugged and turned back towards the window.

His mother sighed. "I called your father at work after I heard," she started to say, "we are both very disappointed in you." Mike continued to stare out the window, earning him a glance of disapproval from her. "Michael, pay attention! What in the world were you thinking?"

"You wouldn't understand," Mike said, resting his head on the headrest and closing his eyes tightly. His mind was still too preoccupied with Will. What would cause him to run off like that?

"Well, you better try your best to make me understand!" she responded. "Punching another student? Getting suspended for the week? What would cause you to do something so *stupid*???"

"It's not that simple," Mike said, sighing. "He was saying some things about Will, and I couldn't just stand there and--"

"Oh, so it was just a few playground insults?" Karen interrupted.

“You’re better than that, Mike!” Playground insults. That was the phrase that Principal Thomas had used as well. It had sent anger through Mike then, and it sent anger through him now. They weren’t just playground insults. Not to him.

“It was more than that!” Mike said defiantly. “It wasn’t just petty insults. Every single day that mouthbreather Troy traumatizes Will and sends him through hell. Last night he woke up crying from a nightmare because of it! I couldn’t just stand there and let it happen again as he kept on telling lies--”

That’s when Mike froze, his analytical mind honing in on another word: “lies.” That was exactly what he had told Will right before he ran off. He had told him that he didn’t want him to worry about Troy spreading lies about him. Then Will had zoned out, cried, and ran. He had just managed to calm him down, and they had agreed on no more violence; what would make him do that all of the sudden? Maybe he was having flashbacks to Troy…or maybe something in the way he had said that last phrase triggered something in Will. Which brought him back to the word “lies.”

“Michael, are you even listening to me?” his mother asked, interrupting his train of thought.

Mike blushed bashfully. “Sorry,” he said. Although his thoughts were still on Will.

His mother sighed. “I said that I know it’s hard for you and your friends, but that doesn’t excuse violence,” she said. Mike could tell that her voice held a tinge of resignation, as if she was still disappointed, but understood his position a bit better. Well, maybe she didn’t understand *everything*, and Mike was eager to keep it that way. “I’m sorry, but there has to be consequences to these actions. You’re going to have to be grounded for the rest of the week.”

That got Mike’s attention. He spun around, looking at her. “But mom, I need to talk to Will! He needs me to help him!”

His mother glanced again at Mike. “Michael, you’re not his only friend. He has Dustin and Lucas to help him with whatever he is going through. You’re not convincing me out of this.”

Mike wanted to protest, but knew it likely wouldn't bear fruit. She was right: Will *did* have Dustin and Lucas. But they didn't know Will like he knew Will. And he desperately wanted to find Will. He wanted to hold him tightly and tell him that no one would ever hurt him again. Not Troy, not his dad, not anyone. That it didn't matter what people thought of him, and that only he knew deep down who he was and no one could change that. He wanted to just make Will love himself as much as Mike loved him.

But once his mother had made up her mind, there was very little he was able to do to change it. After all, Will did have Dustin and Lucas to help him if it came to that. As he sat in silent resignation, Mike's thoughts trailed back to that word, "lies." He had always dismissed what Troy said about Will as lies meant to hurt him. And there was no doubt that Troy meant to hurt him.

…but were they really lies?

Will had spent nearly an hour in the bathroom crying his eyes out. It was the silent type of crying, the type he had gotten used to at home. He had first developed it while his dad was still living with him. At nights, he silently cried himself to sleep while the insults and the hits from the previous days echoed through him. If he had cried louder, then his dad might have heard him, and Will was always petrified about that actually happening. "Pussies cry, men don't," his dad had told him whenever he was caught. "Stop being such a fairy."

After his father left, Will still kept up the practice of crying softly whenever he was alone. He never wanted to wake up either his mother or Jonathan with loud sobs in the middle of the night. They didn't need to be burdened with that. He usually was able to control it. Last night with Mike had been an exception, which he only hated himself for even more. The guilt he felt about what had happened was eating him up, and he knew that he wouldn't be able to keep

everything all to himself for much longer. Only his mom and brother knew about his sexuality, although even they didn't know about his feelings towards Mike.

Suddenly, the school bell rang. Will poked his head out of the stall door and looked at the clock on the wall. He realized that it was already time for lunch. In some ways, it was surprising how long he had spent inside there; in others, he was surprised that it was not already the end of the day, as it had felt like an eternity. Gradually, he got up, wiping his eyes of any final tears. He looked in the mirror. His eyes were red and puffy. There was no way he could face the rest of the school like this, let alone Dustin and Lucas. He didn't have much of an appetite anyway.

Just as Will found himself lacking the courage to leave the bathroom, he heard the door swing open. Standing in front of him was Dustin. *Oh God, why did he have to see me like this*…Will thought to himself, horror flooding through him.

"Will!" he said, giving him a toothy grin. The grin faded away when he saw the state Will was in. He quickly opened the door again and poked his head out. "Lucas, get in here!"

"Dustin, do you really need help taking a piss, hurry u--" Lucas began to say as he entered the bathroom, but stopped as soon as he saw Will. "Will," he said, mouth open in concern. Will looked shyly at both of his friends, shuffling his feet a little bit. He would have been mortified if anyone had seen him like this, let alone two of his best friends in the world.

"Dude!" Dustin said, approaching him. "What happened? Are you okay? Is it true that you and Mike were in a fight with Troy? Where's Mike?"

"Dustin, cut it off!" Lucas snapped at him, much to Will's relief. He wasn't ready to answer any of those questions. Lucas put an arm around his shoulder. "You wanna go outside?" Will, not trusting his own voice, nodded slowly. Following his friends out of the bathroom, they led him outside of the school and sat down at a table. Will was thankful for the fresh air, and only now realized just how suffocating the bathroom was.

They all sat in silence for some time as Will tried to get his bearings. He wasn't crying, but he still wasn't in good shape. He saw Lucas and Dustin sharing concerned glances. The more they stared at him, the more Will became self-conscious about the entire situation.

"Guys, it's fine," Will forced himself to say after a little while. He couldn't take the silence anymore. "I'm fine."

"You're obviously not," Lucas said, rolling his eyes. "How long were you in there?"

Will sighed. "I dunno…since after Mike was picked up by his mom."

"So, it's true? About the fight, I mean," Dustin asked. "Troy and James are going around telling everyone that you and Mike were in a fight with him. The whole school is talking about it."

Great, thought Will sarcastically. "I didn't fight anyone, Mike did," Will said, correcting his friend. Although in a way, he thought to himself, he *did* cause the fight. Mike had fought for him. He couldn't put all of the blame on him. It wasn't right to. "…but I think the fight was because of me."

"What do you mean?" Lucas asked.

"Troy called me a disease," Will said, shuddering at the memory. "That I was a fairy and that I infected everyone around me, like Mike and you guys. Mike said that he wanted to protect me, so he punched him."

"Why am I not surprised," Lucas said, sighing. When Will looked at him worriedly, he explained. "I mean, we all know Troy's an asshole. He had it coming, if you ask me."

"But it didn't need to come to violence," Will replied firmly. But it wasn't just that. "…and I don't think he would want to protect me anyway if he knew the truth." Will had slipped it out before he even really knew what he was saying. Once his thoughts caught up to his words, his eyes widened in shock and his lips became dry in an instant.

"Alright, first off, I call bullshit. You could literally tell Mike to go

jump off a bridge and he would do it," Dustin responded while Will was too paralyzed to continue, "but secondly, what do you mean by 'him knowing the truth'?"

Lucas's and Dustin's eyes were now on him, while Will raged an inner battle with himself. On the one hand, he was petrified of losing his friends. If he told them the truth about him, that he was queer, they could easily think he was a disease just like Troy. But on the other hand, he desperately needed to lift the guilt that had been plaguing him for too long now. It was time to tell them. He *needed* to tell them.

"What Troy says about me is true," Will blurted out, averting his eyes away from his friends. "It's true. I'm a queer." It was the first time he had said it out loud to anyone other than his brother. He shut his eyes and looked down at the table, afraid of their potential reactions as a million different possibilities ran nervously through his head.

"Ha! I *told* you!" Dustin shouted at Lucas. Will, startled, looked up to see Dustin sporting a big, goofy grin. Lucas, meanwhile, was groaning.

"Huh?" Will said, confused. At least they weren't running away or scoffing at him…

"We bet on whether you liked boys or not," Lucas explained, still glaring at Dustin through the corner of his eye. Dustin was still grinning stupidly. "The loser had to buy the next X-Men edition for the winner," he added grudgingly.

"Not just the next edition, the one after that too!" Dustin interjected, turning towards Will. "It was a long-term investment, sure, because neither of us really knew whether you'd tell us outright or not. But it payed off in the end!"

Baffled, Will looked at the both of them. He was at a loss for words. "So…neither of you really care?"

Lucas's expression softened. "Not really. Why would we care who you like? I mean, Dustin likes Jennifer Hayes, but you don't see me giving him shit for it."

Will let out a startled giggle as Dustin hit Lucas playfully. “I do *not*! But regardless, that’s beside the point,” he said.

“But, you’re not going to, like…hate me, or something?” Will said nervously. After all, most of the possibilities that he had run through his head about coming out to his friends ended in them abandoning him. Although the jokes were making made him feel much more relaxed, the whole situation still felt surreal to him now that it was out in the open.

Dustin stared at him incredulously. “We’re friends, dude. If we bailed on you because of something stupid like that, then we’d be pretty shitty friends. Plus, more than that, we’re a party. And the party never splits up, no matter what.”

Will felt a wide grin spreading across his face. It was the first genuine smile since this morning with Mike. “Oh, thank god,” he said, breathing a sigh of relief.

“Did you seriously think we would hate you just because you’re queer?” Lucas said, giving him a reassuring smile. “Give us a little bit more credit, man.”

“Sorry,” Will said, smiling back at his friends. “I just…I…” he stuttered, at a loss for words. Their reaction had caught him completely off guard and it was a little overwhelming for him. “I love you guys,” he said, overwhelmed with gratitude. “Not like that, though,” he added quickly.

Dustin laughed. “Oh, trust me, we know,” he said, “because if I’m right about this, then chances are I’m right about the other thing.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “Wait…what’s that supposed to mean?”

Dustin looked around excitedly and leaned in closer to him. “I mean…you like Mike, don’t you?”

Will’s jaw dropped in shock. Under any other circumstance, he would have been terrified and immediately deny out of fear. But the fact that his friends now knew part of the truth his fear, eroded significantly away by relief, was now replaced by bewilderment.

“How…” Will started to say, at a loss for words once again.

“Ha!” Dustin said, grinning at Lucas. “I’m right again!”

“Dude, you’re too good at this,” Lucas replied, looking at Dustin with a bemused expression. “I’m just glad I didn’t take *that* bet.”

“How did you know *that?*” Will demanded loudly, exasperated. Blushing, he looked around to make sure no one was paying attention, and then he said in a loud whisper, “I-I thought I hid it so well!”

“Will, something you need to know about me is that I’m really good at picking up on social cues,” Dustin said in a matter-of-fact manner. “So, like, I notice how you always try to sit next to Mike whenever you have the opportunity to, and the way you always laugh at his jokes more than the rest of us, and even just how you look at him. One of those pieces on its own might not mean anything, but all of them together told me *something* was going on.”

“He’s got a point,” Lucas admitted. “I just never put two-and-two together, I guess.”

Will blushed at how easily Dustin saw through him. At the very least, he was thankful that someone as kindhearted as his friend was able to figure it out better than someone like Troy. The difference between the two of them was that Troy was a bully who made fun of him, while Dustin was a friend who truly understood him. Although Will had originally thought this conversation would be one of the most painful of his young life, it was becoming one of the most comforting he’d had in a while.

“And just to be clear again, you don’t care about that either?” Will said, confirming.

“Duh,” Dustin said, and Lucas sent a reassuring nod his way to say that he agreed. “Unless you and Mike start making out during an entire Dungeons and Dragons campaign, then we might have to talk.”

Will blanched at his friend’s teasing as Lucas chuckled. “Dustin!” he shrieked, looking behind him nervously to make sure no one else was

listening. “Of course we wouldn’t…wait, what am I saying?” Will hissed, exasperated. “There’s no way that Mike likes me!”

“Dude, if Dustin is right about both of those things about you, then chances are he’s right about Mike, too,” Lucas responded. “I mean, he’s kind of an oracle with this kind of stuff.”

“Yes, I *am* an oracle, and *yes*, there is no way that Mike doesn’t like you,” Dustin said. “You’re just both oblivious of your mutual feelings for each other because that’s how all people who like each other are.”

“Like you and Jennifer Hayes,” Lucas said under his breath, but intentionally loud enough for Dustin to hear.

“No, shut up!” Dustin blushed, glaring at Lucas as he and Will laughed.

Despite finding amusement in Dustin’s embarrassment, Will couldn’t help but allow for his uncertainties and doubts to rise up to the surface. “But…this morning he kind of dismissed that I could like boys at all,” Will said, sighing. “I mean, he said that everything Troy had said were just lies, like there wasn’t even a possibility that any of it was true.”

“Well, what would you expect? Like I said, he’s *oblivious*,” Dustin said, emphasizing the final word for repetition.

“After all, he punched Troy for you,” Lucas added. “It’s not like the signs aren’t there.”

“I guess…” Will said slowly, and gradually the doubts that had been eating him up for the day began to weaken. That tiny voice in his head, the voice that screamed in joy when Mike told him that he could never hate him, and cried in happiness when Mike hugged him tightly and told him that he valued his friendship more than anything, started to reappear from its hiding place. The voice that told him that maybe, *maybe*, there was a chance for them. This voice was now not only appearing in his mind, but also in the voices of his closest friends as well.

“What should I do?” Will asked nervously. “I kind of ran off when he

said that part about the lies…"

"Well, if it were me, I'd go up to him after school and spill it," Dustin said, a suggestion that made Will freeze in fright. Telling his friends was one thing, but telling his secret to the one person whom Will's life revolves around would be terrifying. Besides, what if he already blew it by running? Apparently, the expression on his face was clear enough that both of his friends knew he was very scared of this option.

"Maybe we can come along as back-up?" Lucas suggested helpfully. "You know, for, like, moral support?"

This made Will feel a little bit more at ease, but still really nervous. After hesitating for a moment, he nodded quietly to let them know he was on board.

"Okay, cool!" Dustin said. "So, after school we will all ride over to Mike's place." He looked at Will with a smirk. "And don't worry, Byers, we'll know when to get out once you two start making kissy-faces at each other."

"Shut up," Will said, smiling and hitting Dustin playfully on the arm. His friends definitely helped lighten the mood, and not only that, they gave him a much-needed confidence booster. Although that didn't mean that he still didn't have his doubts and fears. He just hoped Dustin and Lucas would be enough to get past that.

For the past few hours, Michael Wheeler had run what happened earlier in his head a million times. Mike had punched Troy, was at first successful in trying to calm Will down, but then he ran away crying. After running multiple possibilities through his mind, Mike could come up with three potential explanations: one, that Will had felt intimidated that Mike would go to such lengths to protect him

that he felt overwhelmed; two, that Will had gotten an inkling of Mike's true feelings towards him and, being the kind soul that he is, did not want to lead Mike on, causing him to run; or three, that Will had reacted negatively to the word "lies."

That would mean that Troy, despite being a mouthbreather and a cruel idiot, was right in the fact that Will was queer. Of course, Mike didn't see that as a bad thing; in fact, it was the opposite for him. It would only make Mike love him more, even if it didn't necessarily translate to him loving him back. Although every time Mike thought of the possibility that Will liked him, he instinctively pushed it back. It was selfish to hope for such a thing, after all. It was Mike's duty to protect and care for Will, not to try to get with him.

But the more he ran through the different scenarios in his head, the more he acknowledged that there was a very distinct possibility that Will could actually like boys. He hardly considered himself an expert in this area, though. How did someone know if a person liked the same gender? He needed someone to confirm it, even if indirectly. There was no way he was going to ask his dad. His mom was too much of a risk, and plus was still pretty pissed at him for the suspension. So that only left…

From his room, he heard the front door open and close shut as a distant "I'm home" came from downstairs. Nancy. If anyone in his family was going to know anything at all about this, it was probably her. And it was also her he would feel the most comfortable with if he eventually told her the truth about his feelings for Will. Although he didn't want to do that just yet.

As Mike heard Nancy walk up the stairs and close the door to her room, he formulated a plan. He didn't want to "out" Will if he actually was queer, nor did he want to spread falsehoods about his friend if he wasn't. It would then be best, he figured, if he formulated his questions in an indirect, hypothetical way. He knew that his subconscious might be creating a situation that he *wanted* to be true, rather than what was *actually* true. He needed to have a greater degree of certainty that Will actually did like boys, and the only person he knew might have those answers was Nancy.

After settling his buzzing nerves, Mike opened the door to his room

and quietly walked over to Nancy's door. He gave it a small knock. Nancy opened the door, and when she saw who it was her eyes widened.

"Get in," Nancy said, grabbing Mike by the arm and pulling him into her room. She slammed the door. "What the hell were you thinking???" she demanded.

"Huh?" Mike said, until he remembered that she had probably heard of the fight. "Oh." Great. He was probably in for another lecture about this. He was silently thankful that his father would probably be too oblivious to care about it. He sighed. "I'm assuming you heard about it?"

"The fight? Yeah. It's a small school, of course I hear about it when my brother gets suspended for punching another kid." She said, staring at him incredulously as she looked him over. "How did you got a black eye??"

"Look, Nancy, I've already been lectured at by Mom, and I've heard it all," Mike said, backing up towards the door, "so if you want to do it again, then I might as well just leave."

Nancy sighed. "No, stay," she said in a much gentler tone. Mike turned around to see a sad expression on her face. "I'm just worried about you. This isn't like you, Mike."

Mike shifted his feet uncomfortably. Nancy succeeded in one place his mother had not: making him feel guilty. "I know," he admitted, "and I'm sorry for making you worry. But I just…something about this guy made me snap, I guess. He said some really messed-up things about my friends, and I couldn't just stand there and let him do it."

"I get it," Nancy said, resigned. "I'd be really mad too. But next time, please don't go punching people. It got you suspended and it isn't the right way to go about things, anyway."

Jesus, she's really sounding like Will, Mike thought to himself humorlessly. But she was right. "I won't," Mike promised.

"Okay," Nancy said, looking at him questioningly. "So, was there

something you wanted?"

"Oh, yeah," Mike said, gulping. He had just remembered why he had originally knocked on her door. Time to put his plan into action. "Right. So…hypothetical question. How would you know if someone was, um…queer?"

He could see Nancy's surprised expression. From her perspective, this was certainly a divergence from their original conversation, even though Mike knew that they were very much connected. "As in, gay?" Nancy asked. "Why do you want to know that?"

"Yeah, sorry, I'm not sure the right, um, terminology…" Mike said, fidgeting with his hands. "And, I dunno, it's just a hypothetical." This was making him much more nervous than he had originally thought it would.

"Uh huh…" Nancy said slowly, looking at Mike strangely. Mike could tell that she wasn't convinced. *Shit,* Mike thought to himself. What if she found something out? "Well, I suppose it would depend on a case-by-case basis. I couldn't say that there's a specific quality in general that indicates that."

"Oh. Right." Mike said shakily, getting the unnerving feeling that Nancy was seeing right through him. "Um. Noted. Thanks." Mike turned on his heels and headed for the door.

"Michael," Nancy called out to him, causing him to freeze. He slowly turned around to see a bemused expression on her face. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

"No!" Mike said almost too quickly, earning him an eye roll and a laugh from his sister. He had been so used to denying his feelings that it had become second-nature for him; his frustrations, his crushes, and most definitely his sexuality. But even as the word left his mouth, he had a feeling that his sister might already know. She sat down on the edge of her bed and gestured for Mike to sit down next to her. Wearily, he obliged.

"Mike, you know that I'm not like mom or dad, right? I have friends who are gay," she explained. "It doesn't matter to me if you like boys

or not."

Mike sighed. He never truly believed that Nancy would have a *bad* reaction if he came out to her, although it had still freaked him out. "It's not that simple," he began, figuring that he might as well come clean. "I know I've liked girls before…it's just that, I might also like guys too?" It was the first time he had admitted it out loud, to another actual human being. He always knew that it would be at the very least awkward, and it was awkward. Although it felt really good to get it off his chest, and from the looks of things it looked like he had told the right person.

"That's okay," Nancy said, noting the caution in her brother's voice. "I know people who are like that. There's nothing wrong with it." She draped an arm around his shoulder and smiled warmly at him. "You're still my brother, and I love you."

Mike smiled back. "Thanks, Nance. I love you too," he said, hugging his sister. Even if he hadn't originally intended on telling all of this to his sister, it felt great to do so. But then his mind forced him to come back to the original task at hand: Will. "…but that's not why I wanted to talk to you."

Nancy cocked her head, furrowing her brow. "Okay, then what is it?"

"Well, I feel like one of my friends might be, you know, gay…" Mike started to say. He still didn't want to give away Will's name just in case he was right. "So how would I be able to know for certain?"

"Well, most times there's no way that you'll be able to know *for certain*…" Nancy said, studying Mike's face. "…but would this friend's name happen to be Will Byers?"

Shocked, Mike stared with wide eyes and a mouth agape at Nancy. "I'll take that as a yes," Nancy said, giving him a knowing smile, "and to answer your question, yes, I have a pretty strong feeling that he is gay."

"What? How?" Mike questioned.

"Well, just so you know, I'm dating his brother, Jonathan," Nancy

said. “I didn’t tell you because I thought you would find it weird that I’m dating the brother of your best friend.”

“I mean, all things considered, I can think of weirder…” Mike muttered, giving her a small smirk.

“Anyway, he often tells me about how much he worries about Will, and at times he has alluded that he might have problems with his sexuality. How much he struggles with bullying about it is just one example,” Nancy said, “but the most compelling reason for me to believe it is how much he mentions you.”

Mike froze. “Me?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, obviously you,” Nancy said, rolling her eyes. “Nearly every time Jonathan mentions Will he says that he talks about you non-stop and always obsesses over you.”

“Well, he’s my best friend…” Mike started to say, but Nancy cut him off.

“Mike, even I can see that his attachment to you goes something beyond that. You two are basically inseparable at the hip. He practically *begs* to stay the night here every time he comes here. I don’t even talk with him all that much, but it’s written all over his face.”

Mike was still unsure. He knew that they were closer than most friends, but that didn’t necessarily correlate to Will liking him in that way. Any time Will did something that could be interpreted as affectionate, Mike had associated it with his overly optimistic brain. And as a result, he pushed it down to the back of his mind as a non-possibility. He had more important things to worry about: like taking care of Will, for example.

“You feel the same way about him, don’t you?” Nancy asked after Mike had been silent for a while.

Mike sighed. “It doesn’t matter what I feel. All that matters is him.” Just because Nancy thought that Will liked him didn’t mean that he did. He needed to keep his mind on the right track.

“Michael Wheeler, stop acting so self-righteous,” Nancy said, scolding him. Mike looked back at his sister, furrowing his brow. “If you think your feelings don’t matter, then you’re wrong. Has it ever crossed your mind want that what Will wants may be what you want too?”

Mike knew the answer: he hadn’t. Whenever he had thought anything remotely along those lines, he fiercely criticized himself for being selfish and brushed it aside. But maybe, he now thought, just *maybe*, his sister was right. Maybe the best thing that Mike could do for Will...was for him to come clean about his own emotions?

Notes for the Chapter:

> Sorry this chapter took so long to come out! (No pun intended) As you can probably tell, it is quite a long one, and last week I also had to worry about finals and essays so I wasn't able to spend as much time on this. But regardless, I hope you like it! The next couple of chapters should be interesting...

5. Hatching Plans

It was finally the end of the school day. Will had barely been able to concentrate the rest of the day after Dustin and Lucas had convinced him to go back to classes. His mind was still racing about their plan to go talk to Mike after school about…well, everything. The thought of being completely honest with Mike about his feelings for him petrified him to his core. It helped a little bit that his friends had offered to come with him, but at the same time his nerves and anxiety was still abuzz. At the very least, their presence would force him not to chicken out, like he had done so many times before.

“Dude, relax, it will be fine,” Dustin said casually as the boys were gathering their things. He probably noticed how tense he was grabbing his stuff. Will nervously glanced at him as his friend shot him a toothy grin. “You got this.”

Dustin seemed to be very confident with his assertion that Mike liked him back. After all, he was right about Will. Although Will and Mike were two different people, Will constantly reminded himself. Just because his friend was right about him didn’t necessarily make him right about Mike. From Will’s perspective, Lucas seemed to be a little bit more hesitant, although overall supportive of Dustin’s claims.

“Seriously, I wouldn’t worry about it. Mike cares about you a lot,” Lucas said quietly to Will as the trio walked out of the school. Lucas was always somewhat more sensitive and attuned to when Will felt nervous or uncomfortable, even if it was Dustin who had guessed about his true feelings. “Even if he doesn’t like you back in that way, it’s not like he would hate you or anything.”

Will attempted to give him a small smile, but he immediately thought back to his nightmare, where a horrified and disgusted Mike walked away from him. He tried to shake it away. After all, Mike *had* told him that something like that would never happen. But Will didn’t want anything to change between them for the worst.

“Yeah, and if he did, we’d kick his ass for you,” Dustin smirked.

“Dustin!” Will yelled in horror, although he couldn’t help but smile a

little bit. “I don’t want you doing that!”

“Well, good, because it’s not going to come to that,” Dustin said, “if anything, Mike’s gonna start sucking your face after you tell him.”

Will let out a gasp in surprise, looking around frantically to see if anyone was listening to them. “Not so loud!” he hissed as heat rose to his cheeks. “And besides, it’s…it’s not like…” Will stuttered, at a loss for words as the boys approached the bike rack, “…just *no*, okay?”

“Come on, I’m your friend, I’m allowed to tease you,” Dustin said gleefully as Will rolled his eyes. At the very least, the teasing helped ease his nerves a little bit.

As the boys approached the bike rack to get their bikes, Lucas turned to Will with a serious expression on his face. “Look dude, I know you’re nervous. If you don’t want to do this, then you don’t have to.”

Will gulped as he tried to avoid eye contact with him. In reality, it wasn’t just that he was nervous; he was scared out of his mind. But he knew he needed to do it. He took in a deep breath and looked back at Lucas. “I can do this,” Will replied. “I’ve been running from this for too long. I need to come clean to Mike.”

Lucas gave him a comforting smile in return as Dustin broke into a grin. “That’s the spirit!” he said, grabbing his bike. “Come on, what are you waiting for?”

Will got on his bike and slowly rode with his friends away from the school towards Mike’s house. He rode alongside his friends in relative silence, with both Dustin and Lucas making a few offhand comments about the weather and how school was almost out for the summer. Will, in the meantime, was absorbed in his thoughts. Of course, he had his worries and doubts about what would happen; whether he would be accepted by Mike or not if he knew the truth had caused him hours of fear and stress. But he also now felt that there was hope. Hope that he may not only be able to maintain his friendship with Mike, but grow it into something more.

The closer they got to Mike’s house, the more he listened to those hopes. He was winding down the familiar streets that he and Mike

had ridden down so many times. It was one of his favorite things to do: riding with Mike on their bikes back from school, or to Dustin or Lucas's house. The exhilaration he felt when the wind blew past his face was only exceeded by the feeling he felt when Mike would look over at him. Of course, he loved every moment with Mike, so it was hard to choose an absolute favorite thing to do with him. Sometimes just being with him was enough.

His thoughts were put on an abrupt pause when he saw Mike's house appear in the distance. As he let his bike naturally slow down, he inhaled a deep breath of fresh air. He knew what the potential risks could be, but he also knew that he couldn't keep it to himself for much longer. Now that Dustin and Lucas knew, he needed to tell Mike. Despite the freak-out going on inside his head, he knew it was the right thing to do.

After stopping his bike, he led Lucas and Dustin to the front door of the Wheeler house. He squeezed his hand into a fist as he knocked gently on the door. After a painful silence that felt like forever, the door opened, revealing Mrs. Wheeler standing in the frame.

"Oh, hello boys," she said, sighing. Will could tell that she had something else on her mind.

"Hi, Mrs. Wheeler," Will said nervously, trying his absolute hardest not to fidget or stutter. "Um…is Mike here?"

"I'm sorry, Mike isn't available right now," she said, looking at them. "He's grounded until the end of the week. I'm afraid you're going to have to leave."

Will's heart sank as the realization came over him. Mike was grounded. Because of course he would be. How stupid did he have to be to overlook that possibility? After all, he had punched a fellow classmate and got suspended by the principal. Did Will really expect that Mike's mother, of all people, would let that slide?

"Grounded?" Dustin asked, a troubled expression forming on his face. "How come?"

Mrs. Wheeler raised an eyebrow, and even Will had to look at his

friend in disbelief. “He got into a fight at school. I assumed you would have heard about it.”

Of course they had heard about it. Not only was it the buzz of the school, but Will was there to see it. And of course Mike’s mom had heard about it, because Will had heard her car pull up to the school as he ran away from Mike. How could he have *not* seen this coming?

The conversation continued, but at that point Will had tuned out. He had failed. If he wasn’t able to tell Mike how he felt now, then who knew when he would be able to build up the courage to tell him later? What if it was already too late? What if Mike already hated him for running away outside of the school after the fight? What if there wouldn’t be another chance to tell him at all? Once again, he had ruined everything. He was a failure.

“Well, let him know that we said hi, I guess,” Will heard Lucas say, clearly disappointed. They all walked away silently as the door to the Wheeler house closed.

“Well, shit,” Dustin said once they were standing by the curb. “We probably should have seen this coming.”

“It’s alright, though. When Mike gets back to school, then maybe you can tell him?” Lucas suggested.

Will avoided his friends’ eye contact, not trusting himself not to cry. He needed to run. He didn’t feel worthy of their support, and he certainly didn’t feel worthy of Mike. After struggling to form a sentence, he quietly said, “…I need to go.”

Lucas furrowed his brow in concern. “Will…” he said, reaching out to put a hand on his arm. Will dodged it and tried his best to hide his face from them.

“I’m sorry,” Will managed to let out as he got to his bike. It was the most he could reasonably say without his voice cracking. With that, he sped off. He wasn’t able to look back, just like when he ran away from Mike.

“So, you’re going to tell him?” Nancy asked him. It was the conversation Mike honestly thought would never be happening, especially not with his sister. And yet, here he was, talking about how he was going to tell his best friend that he was into him. It wasn’t the *most* awkward conversation he had ever had, but it was still…weird, to say the least.

“I dunno…I guess?” Mike said, blushing at the thought of telling Will how he felt about him. He nervously twiddled his fingers and looked away from his sister.

“You guess?” Nancy repeated, rolling her eyes. “Come on, Michael. Will needs a man who is confident. Try again.”

Mike groaned, hiding his face from her. “Nancy, it’s not…uggghh…” Mike trailed off, knowing that his sister was more than likely right. He needed to be confident. “Yes. Yes, I’m going to tell him.”

“Tell him what?” Nancy replied coyly, causing Mike to groan once again.

“You know!” Mike said indignantly. “That I lo--” he began to say before freezing. There was that word again; that messy, complicated, tricky word. He had almost let it slip to Will before covering himself up. But it was such a powerful word, and even though Mike knew that it was probably, no, *definitely* true, he also thought it was best if he were to keep that small bit to himself. Telling him that he liked him might intimidate Will, but if Mike told him that he *loved* him, then he might be terrified.

And regardless, he sure as shit didn’t want to share something that deeply personal with Nancy.

“That I like him a lot,” Mike finished, clearing his throat. It was a close save, but maybe not a close enough one. Especially because Nancy was now staring at him strangely. Then her eyes began to widen. Oh, shit. Shit shit shit shit shi—

Mike's panic was interrupted when he heard the front door open downstairs and his mother talking to someone. Mike abruptly put a finger to his lips, silently telling Nancy to briefly be quiet, and leaned closer to the door. There was definitely someone at the door, and although he wasn't able to make out what they were saying, he could make out the other voices she was talking to: it was Will. It had to be. Along with Dustin and Lucas.

"I have to go," Mike let out, quickly opening the door and leaving a bewildered Nancy in her room alone. He needed to see Will. But as soon as he came bursting down the stairs, the front door had slammed shut. His mother whipped around to face him. "Was that Will?" Mike demanded.

His mom, a little startled, took a second to reply. "Yes, he was with Dustin and Lucas," she replied coolly. "But I told them they would have to wait to see you until next week."

"What???" Mike questioned, distressed. "Why?"

She sighed in response. "Do I really need to remind you? Honestly, Michael," she said, turning away from him. "You'll see them once you go back to school."

Mike didn't expect his mother to understand his problem, although her indifference did offend him a little bit. For him, this was far bigger a deal than she could comprehend. Especially after how he and Will had left their previous conversation. Will had probably come to apologize for something Mike would forgive him over in an instant, but now that he never got the chance to do that, he was probably devastated. Mike knew Will, and Mike knew when Will needed to be comforted. And knowing Will as well as Mike did, Mike knew that his best friend was probably on his way back home thinking Mike hated him. His mother couldn't possibly understand that. But maybe Nancy could.

He quickly turned around to head back up the stairs, only to bump into Nancy, who was on her way down. Startled for a moment, Mike grabbed a bewildered Nancy's arm and dragged her back upstairs.

"Hey! What's going on?" she asked as Mike led her back into her

room and closed the door. Still panicked, Mike began to nervously pace around his sister's room. "Mike, seriously! What is it?"

"I need to see Will," Mike said at a rapid pace, turning towards his sister. "He was literally just here to see me and Mom didn't let him in. He's probably freaking out right now and thinks I don't want to see him!"

"Slow down," Nancy said, attempting to calm him down. "How do you know that's how he would react?"

"Because I know Will!" Mike snapped back.

"You didn't know that he has a crush on you," Nancy replied, raising an eyebrow.

"You don't…it's…that's not the point!" Mike stuttered out. "I know that he's spent years being insecure about himself because of assholes like Troy and his dad harassing him. And I know that he constantly second-guesses himself and thinks of himself as lesser than everyone else, despite being the best person on the entire goddamn world. And I also know that he's in a really emotionally fragile state right now, so he's probably on his way home crying right now and thinking he doesn't deserve to be friends with me…or something!" He let out a deep breath. "That's why I need to see him! To tell him that he *is* worth it, and that everything will be okay, and just hold him for as long as it takes until he knows that people out there care about him! I need him to know that *I* care about him!"

Mike was red in the face, and he felt fairly close to being on the verge of tears. The thought of not being able to comfort Will in a time of need was heart wrenching for him. He needed Will to know that it didn't matter how many nightmares he'd had, or how many panic attacks he had endured, or how many times he was bullied by Troy; what mattered was that Mike would *always* be there for him. That was what Nancy needed to understand.

Mike studied his sister. She seemed to be pensive, contemplating exactly what she was going to do. After a prolonged silence, she finally spoke. "You're grounded," Nancy said matter-of-factly.

“So what?” Mike started to say. “That doesn’t mean that—”

“I’m not finished,” she said, cutting him off. Mike’s mouth clamped shut before Nancy continued. “You’re grounded. But if you really think that you need to see Will tonight, then I can help you get to him.”

As he processed her words, Mike’s eyes lit up as he felt a grin spread across his face. He quickly lunged at his sister, pulling her into a tight hug. “Thank you!” he said enthusiastically, almost squealing.

“First I hear that you punch someone at school, then you come out to me, and now you’re hugging me,” Nancy said, smirking while also hugging her little brother back. “You’re full of surprises today, aren’t you?” she chuckled, before pulling away from him. “But if this is going to work, then I’m going to need you to do exactly as I say.”

“Got it,” Mike said in response.

“So, it’s actually kind of convenient that you need to do this, because I was planning on going out with Jonathan later tonight,” Nancy began to explain to a very attentive Mike. “I can drive you to the Byers’ house on my way there and you can talk to Will. But it would seem too suspicious if you simply vanished as soon as I left, so I’ll pretend to leave early. What I need you to do is wait until after dinner and act like everything is normal. Listen to whatever rant Mom will want to give you…but after dinner close the door to your room and leave some music playing on in there.”

“Music?” Mike asked, skeptical of the amount of effort Nancy was putting into their little scheme.

“Trust me, it works,” Nancy replied, “I’ve done it whenever I need to sneak out during the night, and Mom still hasn’t caught on. So, once you do that, go into my room and climb out the window.” She pointed towards the window. “It’s pretty easy to get in and out of, or so I’ve been told. Just be careful.” Mike rolled his eyes and looked out the window. It didn’t seem like a steep climb down at all, and Mike could only imagine how many times someone like Jonathan had used the window to get up. “I should be parked somewhere nearby when you get out, and then I’ll drive you over.”

“Wow,” Mike said, impressed by his sister’s planning. “And, you’d really be willing to do all that?”

Nancy rolled her eyes. “Of course, dummy. I’m your sister.”

And thank God for that, Mike thought to himself as he smiled at her. After all, he wasn’t sure many other sisters would go through all of this in order to help a grounded brother meet a boy he had a crush on.

After leaving his friends in the dust, Will had ridden to one of the few places that was able to give him some semblance of comfort: Fort Byers, lodged in the woods behind his house. Although the small, man-made structure usually was able to cheer up the small Byers boy, unfortunately it did not do the trick this time. He spent much of the afternoon crying, despite his best attempts to try to fight back the tears. Will couldn’t help it; the more he cried, the more he hated and belittled himself for it, which caused him to cry even more.

Will especially hated not being able to see Mike. Of course, he was grounded, but he couldn’t help but wonder: what if it was something more than that? What if he had already screwed up beyond repair, and Mike didn’t want to see head or tail of him? Mike had shown him his heart, and Will repaid him by running away like a baby. Mike was probably sick of him, and rightly so. He didn’t deserve to have such a caring friend, and he’d probably just lost him anyway. He might as well just flush any hopes of something deeper between them down the drain, Will thought to himself hopelessly.

Despite being covered underneath the blanket of the fort, Will suddenly felt a couple of raindrops fall in through the cracks. Will sighed, getting up as it started to drizzle down. *How appropriate,* Will thought bitterly to himself. After all, it might as well have been raining from his eyes for that entire day. Sighing and getting up, he

resigned himself to head inside and try to sleep the pain away. Hopefully, his mother or Jonathan weren't home to see him in this sorry state.

Will walked up to the backdoor of his house and slipped in before locking the door behind him. "Will? Is that you?" he heard from further inside the house. It was his mom. Well, crap.

"Yeah," Will managed to let out, trying to hide the glum demeanor in his voice. Unfortunately, even he knew that he did a poor job at doing this.

His mom came around the corner as Will walked down the hallway towards his room. "Is everything okay?" she started to say as she laid eyes on him and saw, probably from his puffy, red eyes, that he had been crying. "Oh, honey…" she quickly walked over to him and knelt down to give him a hug. Will could only imagine how pathetic he probably looked right then. Just like when Dustin and Lucas had found him in the bathroom earlier that day.

Will tried to gently push away his mother. "Mom, I'm fine," he said quietly. He didn't want to go over the events of the day once again; he wasn't sure he had the energy, both physically and mentally, to do so.

Will's mom was still looking at him worriedly. "Will, sweetie…if there's something you want to tell me, then—"

"It's okay," Will said in response. "I…I'll tell you later. I just need to be alone for now, okay?"

His mother sighed. "Okay, sweetie, I trust you," she said, pulling him closer and lightly kissing him on the forehead. "I will be here if you need anything." Will tried his best to smile at her. He always genuinely appreciated the love and affection he got from her and Jonathan, but he never wanted to feel like a burden. And that's what he felt like right now: a burden.

As his mom walked away, Will turned into his room and closed the door. He could hear her talking with Jonathan, who he supposed was home right now too. But he didn't process any of what they were

saying. Exhausted from an emotionally draining day, Will collapsed onto his bed.

The truth was, he didn't want to be alone right now. He wanted to be with Mike, to apologize to him, and stop all of this lying to him. But with his friend being grounded and potentially not wanting to see him, Will wasn't sure if that was going to be possible.

Will might have felt quite a bit better, however, if he knew that approximately ten miles away Mike Wheeler was hopping out of the window of his sister's room to go see him.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Huzzah, another chapter done (finally)! Thank you all for your patience, I know this one took a lot longer to get out than any of the others. Unfortunately, life happened. But here it is! I'm not exactly sure when the next chapter will be ready, but I'll let you all know now that it's going to be a good one ;) As always, comments and kudos are appreciated, and thanks for reading!

6. The Other Side of the Storm

It was beginning to rain fairly hard by the time Mike was climbing out of the window. As rain droplets pelted down on him, he only barely managed to close the window as he climbed down from the house. Nancy was right: it wasn't that difficult, although the weather did make it a tad bit more difficult. As he jumped down onto the wet grass, he squinted his eyes to try to see if Nancy's car was parked on the street. Thankfully, she flashed her headlights towards him so he could see, and Mike then sprinted towards the car and went into the passenger seat.

"Did you leave music playing in your room?" Nancy asked him as soon as he closed the door to the car.

Mike rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I think you made it pretty clear how important that part was to the plan."

"Okay, cool," Nancy said, shifting gears from park to drive before glancing at him worriedly. "Did you close the window to my room on your way out?"

"I did, although you didn't say to do that in your plan," Mike said, smirking.

"Well, I didn't know it was going to be raining, and I don't want my room to be a swamp by the time I get back," Nancy said as the car sped across the street, leaving the Wheeler house in the dust. "But thanks anyway," she said as she looked at Mike through the corner of her eye.

The drive to the Byers' house was not long by any means. Under normal circumstances, Mike would have ridden there on his bike, but he certainly appreciated the ride, and these weren't normal circumstances. The nervous energy that usually accompanied him on his regular bike rides to Will's was amplified by a million times due to the conversation that may occur once he arrived.

"If you're nervous, don't be," Nancy said to him, who Mike figured likely had picked up on his nervousness. "Just be honest with him,

and be honest with yourself, and it should work out just fine. Trust me."

"And if it doesn't?" Mike questioned nervously. After all, he hadn't even considered the possibility that Will might like him back before today. He was still full of doubts that his sister was right.

"Then you can say I was wrong and rub it in my face for the rest of my life," Nancy said sarcastically, smirking. "But I'm not wrong, so I'll get to say 'told you so' instead for the rest of your life."

Mike chuckled. "You're lucky that you're my sister and that I love you," Mike said, although his mind soon became distracted as the car approached the Byers' home.

"Love you too," Nancy said, smiling at him as the car came to a halt. "And now's your time to shine."

"W-what do I do?" Mike stuttered as the reality of the situation became apparent to him. "Do I just go up to the front door and knock? Or should I go through the back?"

Nancy pursed her lips, thinking for a moment. "No," she said after a brief moment. "Go around the house to the window of his room and tap on it."

Mike furrowed his brow. "Huh?"

"It'll be more romantic for you to stand outside in the rain outside of his window," Nancy teased, earning her a groan from Mike. "Although seriously, if Joyce sees you she might ask Mom if you're allowed to be here."

Mike sighed. "Alright, I guess I'll do that then," he said as he clutched the car door handle. Before he left, however, Nancy grabbed him on the shoulder to stop him, causing Mike to turn towards her.

"You can do this," she said, becoming serious for a moment. "You're strong. You're brave. Be the man you'd want to be for Will."

Mike bit his lip. No matter how much it scared him, he knew his sister was right. He would be strong. He would be brave. "I will,"

Mike said, smiling at her. “Thanks.”

Nancy smiled back. “Go get him, tiger.”

Giving Nancy one last smirk, Mike turned away and opened the car door. Running out into the rain, he went around the small, one-story house and towards Will’s window. He knew exactly where to go.

Will lay on his side on top of his bed, facing the door. Just from the noise alone, he could tell that the rain outside was coming down really hard. Normally, he would have found the sound of falling rain soothing, but due to recent events it only worked him up even more. The ferocity of the weather outside matched the inner agitation he was currently going through. He had hoped that maybe, if he laid down, he would be able to get some sleep to help him escape from this living nightmare, but no such luck. Nevertheless, he closed his eyes, attempting to get some semblance of rest after an exhausting day.

Suddenly, Will heard something from the window. *Tap-tap-tap*. Unlike the sound of the raindrops, this was a firm and sequential noise, almost as if someone was knocking on his window. Furrowing his brow, Will turned over on his bed, only to see someone standing outside in the pouring rain. And not just anyone: a particular skinny boy that turned his legs into liquid and his brain into mush. And now this person was standing outside of his window. In shock, Will rushed over to the window and opened it. Could it really be…

“…Mike?” Will questioned in disbelief as he poked his head outside. He still wasn’t exactly sure if this was part of a dream or not. There was no way he could actually be here.

“Will!” Mike replied, smiling brightly. Mike appeared to be drenched from head-to-toe, with his already dark hair being somewhat darker

and, instead of poking out in every direction, sticking to his scalp. Despite this appearance, he seemed to radiate brightness from Will's perspective. "Can I come in?"

Will realized that he was blocking the window from him and blushed. "Sure!" he blurted out quickly, moving a little so Mike could come in. Mike swung one of his legs over the window and, for extra stability, latched onto Will's hand with his own. The contact with him was enough to convince Will that this most certainly was not a dream.

Michael Wheeler was now in his room, a reality that became clear to Will as soon as Mike closed the window. "Sorry for, uh, being so wet," Mike said apologetically as he turned to Will. His shoes, now soggy, had left quite the footprint in his room, and Mike was still dripping with water from the rain.

"Th-that's not…it's okay!" Will stuttered out, attempting to reassure him. His brain, running at a million beats per second, was malfunctioning on him. "I'll…I'll go get a towel!" Flashing a quick smile at his friend, Will ran out of his room and into the bathroom to get a towel. Clutching the long piece of fabric, he ran back to his friend and closed the door to his room. He offered Mike the towel, who took it gratefully.

"So, um…" Will started to say, trying to form a coherent thought as he stood opposite his friend. "Why are you here?" he said at last. "Not that I mind," he quickly added, not wanting Mike to think he didn't want to see him, "I mean, I'm glad you're here and all but… why?"

Mike shrugged, giving Will the small smile that he couldn't help but gush over. "Well, I guess I just wanted to see you is all," Mike said. "Also, I knew you tried to come by my house earlier, so I thought I'd repay the favor."

That reminded Will of his attempted visit earlier that day, which in the most recent confusion he had completely forgotten. "But…your mom say you were grounded earlier?" he said questioningly, now even more puzzled as to why he was here.

Mike smirked, averting Will's eye contact as he wrapped the towel

around himself. “Weeeell…” he dragged out mischievously, leaning against the wall, “let’s just say that I gave myself some leeway on that front.”

“Mike!” Will couldn’t help but giggle, although he felt like he should at least attempt to be mad at him. “Did you *really* think it’s a good idea to leave your house while you’re grounded??”

“Best decision I’ve ever made,” Mike responded with a grin. *Damn it, Mike, I’m supposed to be scolding you,* Will thought to himself, cursing Mike for having such a beautiful face. “Besides, I wanted to see how you were doing, especially after how our last conversation ended.”

Will felt his smile falter at that as the memory of how he ran away from his friend came back to him like a punch to the gut. “Oh… yeah,” Will said, sighing as he gently sat down on his bed, facing Mike. “I…I’m sorry. For running off,” Will looked at Mike with concern. Now that he had the chance to rectify the earlier mistake, he needed to be brave and actually look at Mike. “I understand if you’re upset with me over that. It…it was wrong for me to do.”

“Will, it’s alright,” Mike said to him, sitting down next to him with the towel still draped over his shoulders. “And I wasn’t upset at you. If anything, I was just confused. I didn’t…I don’t want you to feel like you’re alone.”

Will nodded, biting his lip in nervousness. “Dustin and Lucas were able to help me out some. I know that I’m not alone,” he said, trying his best to reassure Mike even though he had felt very alone only ten minutes ago.

“I’m glad they could help, but I want to help too,” he replied, sighing. “It makes me feel worthless when I don’t know what’s going on, or if I can’t make things better.”

That caused Will to sit upright and look directly at Mike. He couldn’t be further away from the truth. “Michael, you are the least worthless person in my entire life. You’ve helped me so many times when I’ve felt like shit. You make me feel more confident in myself as a person and make me feel wanted, and like people actually like me. Please don’t think you’re worthless, ever. I don’t know where I would be

without you in my life."

Mike smiled gratefully, bringing Will into a tight hug. He was still somewhat damp from the rain, but Will didn't mind; just his touch was enough to rejuvenate his spirits. Will always loved their hugs, but something about this hug seemed…different. More meaningful, in a way. Although he wasn't sure whether it was his optimistic voice inside his head telling him that or not.

"Thanks, Byers," Mike said as Will rested his chin on the taller boy's shoulder. "Let's make a deal: I'll stop thinking I'm worthless if you stop thinking that I could ever possibly hate you."

Will laughed. "You already made that pretty clear last night," he said. "But okay, deal."

"Great!" Mike replied happily, giving him a tight squeeze with his arms before pulling away. Although Will felt mildly disappointed at the end of the hug, Mike's smile made it worth it, and Will couldn't help but imitate it. "So, do you want to talk about what happened back at school when my mom picked me up?"

Oh, boy. Will knew that he would have to explain it at some point to him. And unlike the previous plan he had hatched up with his friends, Dustin and Lucas weren't there for him to fall back on in case things went awry. Where would he even begin? There was certainly a lot to unpack…would he tell him everything? His sexuality? His insecurities? And, perhaps most importantly, is feelings for him? He had already resolved to do so earlier today…should he stick to it? Even still, he risked so much by telling him, and it could spell out doom for their friendship. What would Mike say if he told him that –

"It's alright if you don't want to talk about it," Mike said abruptly, breaking Will's train of thought. He turned towards Mike. "But…I just want you to know that I'm here for you, always."

Will smiled at him. He had always had insecurities and fears of Mike leaving him, but in that moment Will truly believed what his friend was saying. He believed that he *would* always be there for him, and that all Mike wanted was to know what was going on. He deserved that much. "Th-thanks, Mike," he said, breathing in deeply. He

needed to tell him. “Okay,” he said shakily, gripping his fidgeting hands on his knees. “I…I’ll tell you.”

Mike, likely sensing how nervous he was becoming, put a comforting hand on his back. “Easy, Will,” he said, trying to soothe him, “you don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to.”

“No, I want to tell you,” Will said, feeling a little calmer with Mike’s touch. He turned towards his friend, who he now noticed was very close to him. “Just…I know I said I wouldn’t ever think that you would hate me, but it…what I’m about to say might make you uncomfortable.”

Mike rolled his eyes, moving his hand from his back to Will’s shoulder, wrapping his arm around his back. “I guarantee you it won’t,” he said. “But what is it?”

Will sighed, looking back down at his hands. He supposed the nightmare would be a good place to start. “So…remember right before Troy came, and I was telling you about my dream the other night? Where…where I woke up crying?” Mike nodded. “What I told you was true…but it wasn’t the whole truth. Troy said some mean things, but they weren’t untrue. In the dream, he called me a fairy. And…he was right. He knew. I…I am a queer.” The last word was let out shakily, but clearly enough so that he knew Mike had heard him. “That’s why I got so upset when you said that they were just lies after the fight, because they weren’t. It was all true. I’m sorry. You were defending me for no reason.”

Will felt Mike’s arm stiffen around him for a brief moment, but then it relaxed and remained in place. “Will, it’s alright. Something like that would never change my opinion of you,” he said. Under any other circumstance, Will would have been relieved and just stopped there. But he needed to tell him the rest.

“There’s more,” he said, continuing, taking another shaky breath as he used all of his willpower to try to keep it together. “In the dream, Troy also said that I liked you. As in *like* liked you. And that’s also—” Will’s voice cracked as he felt tears rise up in his eyes. “It’s true. I like you in that way. I spent so long trying to push those feelings down, and I wish I could change them, but I can’t. I’m sorry. Everything

Troy said about me was true. I'm a bad excuse for a friend and I don't deserve your protection. I'm sorry for being dishonest with you." He felt tears trickle down his cheeks as he again looked down at his hands, too afraid to see Mike's reaction.

A silence met the room as Mike pulled his arm away from Will. Will feared the worst. He closed his eyes. At this moment, he believed that his friend Dustin was dead wrong. There was absolutely no way that Mike could ever return those feelings. Why did he even hope for that in the first place? Right now, all Will hoped for was that Mike's reaction wouldn't be one of disgust, and that he wouldn't simply walk away like he did in his nightmare. Although truth be told, he wouldn't blame him if that's what Mike did. He was a liar and a freak, and he didn't deserve someone as caring and compassionate as Mike.

"Will." Mike said, and, to Will's utter surprise, he held one of his hands with his own. "Look at me. Please." Slowly, Will opened his eyes and turned towards Mike. Mike got the towel off of him and used it to lightly brush away the tears on Will's face. Will studied his expression carefully: it wasn't one of betrayal, anger or disgust, but of warmth. As Mike put the towel down behind them on the bed, Will once again became very aware of how close they were physically to one another.

"I haven't been completely honest with you, either," Mike began slowly, maintaining eye contact with Will. "I mean, everything I've told you about what I think about you is true. But I left out some… important details."

"What do you mean?" Will managed to say, looking back into Mike's eyes.

"Well, it's a bit too complicated to explain, and I'm not too good with words," Mike said, and Will suddenly noticed that his friend was narrowing the tiny space between them by a considerable amount. "It would be better, I think, if I showed you." It was at that moment that Michael Wheeler leaned in and kissed him squarely on the lips.

Shocked beyond words, it took Will a second before he was able to kiss back. It was soft yet became more passionate as it lasted. Will

closed his eyes. Even though his mind was screaming internally, all that he was thinking about at that moment was that Michael Wheeler was kissing him, and he was kissing him back.

After what felt like the longest period of time of Will's life, the two boys pulled away from each other. As Will opened his eyes and the thoughts of what just happened began to process in his mind, his mouth gaped open.

Will saw Mike turn a dark red as he broke eye contact. "I, uh…I like you too," he said, embarrassed. Will still didn't say anything, as he was in deep shock. Even though Dustin had predicted it, the reality of the situation was still too much for him to believe. "Will?" Mike asked, concern etched in his voice. The two of them were still holding hands. "Are…are you okay?"

Knowing that he needed to respond in some way, Will attempted to say something, but nothing but air came out when he opened his mouth. He cleared his throat. "Yeah," Will said, and as he said the word, a wide smile began to grow on his face and warmth flooded his chest. "I've never been better."

After what could easily be described as the most extraordinary kiss of his young life, Mike Wheeler decided that he needed to tell Will everything. He went on to explain about how he had always felt gravitated towards him, but recently he had felt deep down that he felt something deeper towards him. He explained how he had begun to question his sexuality, and how it had helped contribute to him not getting a lot of sleep at night.

"Aw, Mike, you should have told me," Will said, smiling sympathetically at him. The two of them were leaning on the pillows of Will's bed, although Will's head was resting comfortably on Mike's shoulder.

“I know, and I’m sorry,” Mike said, sighing as he lowered his head down to kiss the top of Will’s hair. “I was just scared, you know? I didn’t want anything to change between us.”

“I was scared, too…” Will replied, and Mike looked down to see him smiling contentedly. “You know, Dustin was right about you.”

Mike quirked his eyebrow. “What do you mean?” he asked as Will scooched up a little bit so they were eye level with each other. Both boys turned onto their sides so they were both facing each other.

“Earlier today, when Dustin and Lucas found me, I accidentally let it slip that I, um, y’know…” Will started to say as he blushed a little bit (which Mike found adorable), “…liked guys. Dustin then told me he had made a bet with Lucas that I did and that I had a crush on you. After I told him he was right he said that he suspected that you felt the same.”

Mike laughed as he brushed a lock of hair out of Will’s eyes. “That’s funny, because Nancy told me she thought you liked me, too,” he admitted before smirking, “I guess we were the only oblivious ones.”

“Oh my god, your sister knows?” Will said, letting out a quiet giggle. He yawned and looked at him as Mike became locked once again into his eyes. Unlike previous times before, neither made any move to break the eye contact. “I still can’t believe this is real,” Will said.

“Believe it,” Mike said, before leaning in once again for a kiss. This one didn’t last as long as the first one, but it was long and meaningful enough for the both of them. When they were done, they rested their forehead against each other as Mike noticed Will still had his eyes closed. “Will, I, um, I’m not really experienced in how relationships with two guys works, and it’s not like Hawkins is the best place for people like us,” Mike started to say, trying to find the right words to explain what he wanted to him. “But…um, I mean the important thing is that I really like you and you like me, so I was wondering if maybe you’d want to–”

“Mike,” Will interrupted him, lazily putting a finger over his lips and staring at him with sleepy eyes. “I said yes a long time ago. We can work it out later.” Mike smiled fondly at him, pulling the smaller boy

closer to his chest. “For now, can we just stay like this? Until you have to leave to go home?”

“Of course,” Mike said, understanding exactly what he supposed was his new boyfriend needed: sleep. He kissed his head as Will snuggled comfortably against his chest, sending another wave of butterflies through Mike.

Despite the lack of sleep he had gotten the previous night, Mike did not feel tired at all. Mike always felt electric when he was around Will, although this time it was much, much different. Will had said that he couldn’t believe that this was happening, and in all honesty, Mike couldn’t believe it either. He had done it. Or, rather, *they* had done it. Will had been the first to tell him the truth, something that had surprised Mike at first but in hindsight shouldn’t have. Will was the bravest person he knew, even if Will was the last person to realize it. But Mike would make sure he realized it, in time.

Still, Mike couldn’t be more in awe of what had just happened. He had kissed Will. He had a boyfriend. Will now not only knew how he felt about him, but felt the same way back.

…although, Mike wondered if it was with the same intensity. While Mike had wanted to tell him everything, he had omitted one small, tiny detail: the l-word. Love. His feelings were still very complicated and very messy, but Mike was certain now that he loved Will. However, he knew it was a strong word, and he didn’t want to say it before Will was certain of his feelings, too. After all, the last thing he wanted to do was scare him.

Mike looked down at the small Byers boy, who was drifting away to sleep. Although a part of him did want to tell him that he loved him, he also knew that he had gained so much in such little time with Will. He smiled. He would definitely have time to tell him, and in his mind he resolved to do so. Soon. For the time being, he would just enjoy this right now, lying down with a curled-up Will on his bed.

Suddenly, he heard the knob of the door to Will’s room turn, and, much to Mike’s horror, the door slowly began to open. Crap. As Mike lifted his head, he saw that it was Will’s mom opening the door. And now she was going to see her son sleeping intimately against a boy

that snuck into his house. Double crap. Frozen in place, his head ran through a million different nightmare scenarios. He had no idea if Mrs. Byers was accepting of being gay, although because this was Hawkins, Mike just assumed that all adults weren't understanding of it. Would what they had developed between them come shattering to the ground just as quickly as it had appeared?

As Mike looked despairingly in the direction of the doorway, he saw Mrs. Byers's shocked expression as she processed what she was seeing. A hand lifted to her mouth. But then, what Mike saw next would probably catch him off guard even more than her initial entrance: after removing her hand, he saw a wide, relieved grin on her face. Will, turned away from the door, still seemed to be asleep. Mrs. Byers, who he noticed seemed somewhat teary-eyed, looked at Mike and mouthed the words 'thank you' clearly enough for it to register for him. Mike, still surprised by this turn of events, took a few seconds before he replied with a small, shy smile and a nod. She gave him one last grin before closing the door quietly behind her.

Bewildered yet thankful, Mike laid his head back down and sighed. He certainly knew that it wouldn't be easy for him and Will going forward, but it helped to know that they had allies they could count on, not the least of which being Joyce Byers. With a helpfully-scheming sister, reliable friends, an accepting mother of a friend, and a sleeping boyfriend lying next to him, for the first time since he began questioning himself Mike felt truly comfortable with who he was.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Sorry for the wait everyone, but this is the chapter that everyone's been waiting for! I really hope you all like it :)
>
> ALSO it is important to note that there is unfortunately only going to be one more chapter in this story, which will basically tie up anymore loose ends and get you that last dose of fluff. But this is basically the climax of this fic, so to speak. So I really hope you all have enjoyed reading it! I've certainly enjoyed writing.

7. Making It Through Together

Mrs. Byers, or Joyce, as she insisted Mike call her, had proven to be quite the understanding individual, and a very important ally. Much to Mike's surprise, she had even been able to pull some strings with his mother to relax his sentence of house-arrest. The day after Mike snuck over to the Byers house, Joyce had called to convince his mom that Mike needed to keep up with homework, and so it was decided that, for a brief period of time every day after school, he could go over to Will's to help catch up. But his mother emphasized that his visits were solely so that he could keep up in school, and that he could only meet with Will and only Will about homework-related matters.

Mike followed his mother's request…somewhat. He certainly met with Will and only Will, outside of maybe Joyce and seeing a little bit of Jonathan. He did remember a little bit of going over homework taking place. Although he also remembered that, while Mike was talking about homework, he would sometimes become distracted and instead talk about how beautiful Will's eyes were, causing Will to blush a deep scarlet that lit up Mike's world. He definitely remembered quite a few kissing sessions. So maybe he didn't follow his mother's instructions to the letter, but he got what he needed out of his visits.

Over the weekend, Mike was stuck at home. With all of the necessary weekend homework already taken care of on Friday, he had no excuses this time to go see Will. Even though it was just two days, it became agony for him. He wondered if Will felt the same way. Late at night he was able to sneak up to his room with his RadioShack supercom and attempted to contact him. Much to his relief, Will answered on both Saturday and Sunday night.

What was meant to be a short little "hello" ended up being hours-long conversations. Just talking to him, even when they were blocks away from each other, made Mike feel a million times better. It didn't even matter what they talked about, sometimes it was just how their days went, sometimes it was absolutely nothing at all, but what mattered was just being able to talk to Will.

“I’m sorry, Mike,” Will said late on Sunday night after a very long talk, yawning as Mike was lying in his bed, “I can’t stay up any longer. It’s a school night…” he trailed off, and Mike could tell that on the other side Will seemed to regret having to go.

“It’s ok!” Mike said into the supercom, hoping to reassure his boyfriend. “I’m back at school tomorrow, so we can see each other then.”

“Finally…” he heard Will groan tiredly, causing Mike to smirk. After a brief pause, the line crackled again. “What about Troy? I know he’s going to want to cause trouble once you get back.”

“He will,” Mike agreed, instinctively moving his hand to his face to rub where his black eye once was. It had faded for the most part, but he still remembered the fight all too well. “I have a plan for Troy. I’ll need your help, but I want to deal with him the right way this time.”

There was a pause. “What do you need me for?” Will asked.

“I’ll try to explain tomorrow, but if there’s no time just follow my lead,” Mike said. “It will work out. I promise. Get some sleep.”

“Okay,” he heard Will sigh on the other end. There was a pause on both sides, both trying to find the words to say goodbye. “G’night, Mike,” Will said at last.

Mike smiled. “Goodnight, Will,” he said. For Mike, he wanted to leave the conversation with one last parting phrase: “I love you.” Despite resolving to tell him soon, he had been unable to do it when they had met after that night. And he certainly didn’t want to say something so vital and important for the first time over a walkie-talkie. But the more he put it off, the more he was sure that it was true, and the more he felt the urge to tell Will.

Tomorrow, he told himself. He would tell him tomorrow. But not before he took care of Troy.

The next morning, Mike woke up more awake than ever. He scarfed down his breakfast and earning himself a gentle scolding from his mother, while Nancy simply smirked at him, knowing exactly why he

wanted to get to school so quickly. Soon, Mike was out the door and on his bike, racing towards Hawkins Middle School.

As he approached the school and slowed his bike, he was able to see the figures of Dustin, Lucas, and, of course, Will standing by the bike rack. Will grinned at him with obvious excitement, and Mike could not help but grin back at him. He noticed smirks on both Lucas and Dustin's faces, remembering that Will told him that they knew all about it.

"Hey guys," Mike said, attempting to be casual as he put his bike on the rack. While in the process of getting off his bike, however, Will ran over to him and gave him a surprisingly-tight hug. Mike was caught off guard at first, but was quick to return it and give him a small kiss on the cheek.

"Hey Wheeler, where's my kiss?" Dustin teased, causing Lucas to snicker. Mike blushed and half-heartedly rolled his eyes.

Mike stepped a little bit away from Will, blushing sheepishly. "Good to see you too, guys," he said sarcastically if good-naturedly. As long as they were accepting, then he was fine with the teasing. He looked over at Will to see him blushing too, but he was also smiling.

"It's been a long week without you, man," Lucas said, slapping Mike on the shoulder as he and Dustin brought him into a group hug, which once again included Will. "Next time, let us know when you get us suspended, okay?"

"It's not like I was planning on it!" Mike laughed, as his friends got off of him. "But regardless, I don't plan on being suspended again for something like that. I don't like what I did, and I plan on making it better."

"Making what better?" Dustin asked curiously. "Are you talking about Troy?"

"What are you planning on doing?" Will asked, biting his lip worriedly.

"I'm going to deal with him, our way," Mike said confidently. He

knew he didn't have much time to get into a full explanation, as he knew that Troy usually came to school at around this time. "Look, you guys don't have to do anything," he said to Dustin and Lucas, "but Will, I'm going to need your help."

"You told me that last night," Will said, earning some *oooooh*'s from Dustin and Lucas. Will rolled his eyes. "But what is it, exactly?"

Mike looked at Will with a serious expression on his face. "Well…I figured that most of this trouble could have been avoided if we were just honest with each other from the beginning," he tried to explain, "so…maybe it would be best to handle Troy by being honest again?"

Will furrowed his brow. "What do you mean?" he asked, still confused. Mike wanted to explain more in detail what he wanted to do, but out of the corner of his eye he saw the figure of Troy plodding towards them. Dustin and Lucas, taking notice of the bully too, exchanged weary looks.

"Just…you trust me, right?" Mike asked him quietly. Will quickly nodded. "Okay. Then follow me." He gestured his head back, causing Will to turn around and notice his long-time tormentor. Mike notice his expression pale a little bit, but then harden with determination. Mike always knew that Will was the bravest person he had ever meant, and it was moments like these that only reaffirmed it. Walking side by side, the two boys made their way slowly over to Troy.

"Can we do anything?" Dustin yelled out at them.

"Just stay there, we'll be back soon!" Mike called back, before coming face-to-face with the bully, the boy who had caused so much harm to them, both emotionally and physically, for so many years. "Hello Troy," he said to his glowering peer standing across from him.

"You have a lot of nerve coming back here, Frogface," Troy spat out, scowling at him. "I'm surprised the principal didn't expel you when he had the chance."

"Like you haven't done worse?" Mike questioned disbelievingly. Although he was not here to argue, he reminded himself.

“Regardless, that’s beside the point. I’m glad we ran into you, because I wanted to apologize.”

Now it was Troy’s turn to be in disbelief, and out of the corner of his eye Mike saw Will was shocked, too. Troy recovered quickly though. “Wow, Wheeler. If you think that getting on your knees begging for my forgiveness is gonna do anything for me, then you’re more pathetic than I thought,” he said in a mocking voice.

“You’re right,” Mike said, unfazed. “Which is why I’d also like to offer my sincerest thanks, because without you, none of this would have happened.”

This time, Troy was caught completely off guard. “What…what the hell are you talking about?” he sputtered.

“Oh, Troy, why are you playing dumb?” Mike laughed, turning towards a still-confused Will. “*This* is what I am talking about.” Suddenly and without warning, he closed his eyes, leaned in and kissed his boyfriend squarely on the lips. Will was off-balance for a moment, probably bewildered out of his mind, but quickly returned the kiss with the same intensity. In that moment, Mike felt like he and Will were on the exact same page.

As Mike pulled back from the sweet yet sensual kiss, his eyes turned back to Troy, whose mouth was agape and was too stunned to say anything. Mike smirked. “Of course, you didn’t get everything right,” he said, smiling. “Like, for example, Will didn’t – what did you say? – ‘sprinkle fairy dust all over me’ or anything. I’ve just liked him like this since forever.”

“And you were way off about Dustin and Lucas,” Will piped in cheerfully, going along with Mike. “They don’t have anything to do with this.”

“But you were right that we are both queer, or gay, or whatever you’d like to call it,” Mike continued, taking Will’s hand in his own. “And without your *help* and *persistence*, we wouldn’t have been able to come out to each other about how we feel. So, thank you for that.”

Troy’s face flushed red in embarrassment as he opened and closed his

mouth multiple times. It was almost as if something in his brain had miraculously stopped working, Mike thought to himself. After a period of silence between them, Troy shuffled awkwardly away from them.

“Whatever,” he mumbled, averting eye contact from them and quickly headed inside. After Troy was out of eyesight, a wide grin spread across Mike’s face. Glancing at Will, he saw a disbelieving smile forming on his face as well.

“Did…did you two just kiss?” Lucas said in shock, running up to them. “In front of TROY???”

“Yeah, I guess we did,” Will replied, blushing.

“But…why?” Dustin asked.

“Because now he doesn’t have any ammo against us,” Mike explained, “he’s used to us getting angry and upset at him taunting us, but now he knows the truth and that we don’t care. Assholes like him thrive off of other people’s suffering, so when he saw that his words don’t affect us anymore, he likely realized that he now has to move on to pick on a different target.”

“Really? So, he’ll just leave us alone now?” Dustin said, impressed by how Mike had been able to pull it off.

“Well, I doubt it, but if he does try to bother us again then we’ll know what to do,” Mike said, grinning at Will who smiled widely in return.

“I guess we do,” Will said happily in response, and Mike once again felt himself get lost in his eyes. Although it was not the first time he had noticed it since they had become “official,” he saw a fiery spark in his eyes that was full of life and hope; something that made Mike love him even more. At last, he was able to protect Will from Troy the right way, the way he had always wanted to.

“Look, I’m cool with you guys doing it, but there is no way that I’m kissing Dustin just to get Troy off my back,” Lucas said. Mike and Will burst out laughing, as Dustin glared mockingly at Lucas. With friends like these, Mike couldn’t care less what Troy or anyone else

thought.

“Did you see his face???” Will asked, giggling as he and Mike rode their bikes to the Byers’ house after school. “He looked like you had just told him that we had Jedi mind powers or something!”

“Yeah!” Mike said excitedly, laughing alongside him. “I wish I could replay that over and over again!”

It had not taken long for word to spread across the school over what had happened. Will had heard people whispering around them throughout the day in between classes. Some had shot them weird, distasteful looks, similarly to Troy; others, however, had come up to him and congratulated him for standing up to Troy. Mainly it was girls, but there were also some boys who said that they had his back and that if Troy tried anything, they would protect him. For such a small, conservative town like Hawkins, it certainly had a lot of people with big hearts. Will had always felt alone at school, but now, with more people on his side than ever, he felt like more people understood him than ever before.

After an exhausting if rewarding day, Mike and Will had decided that they needed a little bit of alone time. After convincing Dustin and Lucas that they could spend some time together after school tomorrow planning their next campaign, they had both set off for Will’s house. Will had missed their bike rides together for the past week, and unlike last time, the weight and guilt of his unspoken feelings were no longer present. He felt free and weightless, and this time it didn’t matter if he got lost in Mike’s eyes…well, as long as he kept enough of his attention on the road so he didn’t crash into a tree or something.

Eventually, they reached his house, and Will got off his bike and laid it on the ground. “I missed this,” he said quietly, smiling at Mike.

Mike raised an eyebrow. “I was here only three days ago,” he said, smirking.

“I know! I mean, I miss riding bikes with you here,” Will clarified, rolling his eyes.

“Oh. Well, in that case, I missed that, too,” Mike said, and without warning he wrapped Will up into a tight hug. He had been more prone to do that as of late, not that Will was complaining in the slightest. He wrapped his arms around the taller boy, sighing contently.

“Do you wanna go somewhere else?” Will asked him, still in Mike’s arms.

“Sure,” Mike said, pulling away. “Where?”

“Follow me,” he replied, taking Mike’s hand in his own and leading him towards the woods. It wasn’t that long of a walk towards Fort Byers, but that didn’t stop Mike from persistently questioning him where they were going. “You’ll see,” he replied teasingly. Will had built the small fortress out of sticks, blankets, and pillows when he was little, and although Mike had known about it, it had been a long time since anyone other than himself had visited it. For Will, it had transformed itself into a deeply personal place.

“We’re here,” Will said, smiling reminiscently as they approached the small, make-shift fort.

“Fort Byers?” Mike said, observing the structure. “Wow. I didn’t realize that it was still standing. Didn’t I help you make it when we were in elementary school?”

“You did, although I’ve made some modifications since so I could still fit,” Will said slyly, opening up the blanket door. “After you.” Grinning, Mike crouched down to enter Fort Byers, lightly plopping himself down on one of the pillows. Will was close to follow behind. “I come here a lot whenever I just want time to myself…to draw, to think, to do whatever,” he explained, sitting down on a pillow adjacent to his boyfriend. “I’ve spent a lot of time here thinking about…well, you…” he admitted, remembering the many times he

had spent crying in Fort Byers over how hopeless he thought his situation with Mike was.

“Aw, Will,” Mike said, giving him a sympathetic smile. He moved his position to slide in next to Will, leaning against the sticks and putting an arm around his shoulders. Mike brushed away the tears in his eyes that Will hadn’t realized were forming.

“Sorry, I’m so pathetic,” Will laughed, blinking the tears away and sniffling. “It just…it means a lot to me that you’re here.”

Mike pressed his forehead against Will’s. “I understand. It means a lot to me that you would take me here. Thank you.” Mike closed his eyes, kissing Will on the lips. Will savored the kiss. Eventually, the two pulled away from each other. “Also, you’re not pathetic,” Mike added, smirking.

“You know what I meant,” Will giggled, burying his face into Mike’s chest. Laughing, Mike moved his arm further around Will’s torso, pulling him closer to him. Will leaned the back of his head against Mike. “I’m proud of what you did today,” he said, referring to Troy.

“You did a lot of work too,” Mike replied modestly. “Without you, there’s no way I would have been able to pull that off.”

“But it was *your* plan, *you’re* the one who pulled it off,” Will emphasized, looking up at Mike. “And it was the right thing to do. We handled Troy the right way. I’m proud of you.”

Mike’s face turned red. “Thanks,” he said, leaning in to plant a kiss on Will’s nose. “If you had told me a week ago that the way to make Troy go away was to kiss you in front of him, then I would have called you crazy.”

Will laughed. “I’m not sure I would have done it…not that I wouldn’t have wanted to kiss you, of course,” he added quickly. “But I wouldn’t have had the courage to do it in front of anyone, especially him. But I dunno, something about you makes me feel more… confident. Like I can do anything.”

Mike smiled widely. “That makes me so happy to hear. You make me

feel the same way."

Will smiled, feeling warm butterflies rise up in his chest. "Something you said before stuck with me, though…about how a lot of this pain could have been avoided if we had just been honest with each other?" Mike nodded. "I liked that a lot. I know we can't turn back time, but…I feel like we should be honest with each other from here on out, with everything."

"Of course," Mike replied, although something in his voice made him seem uncertain. Will furrowed his brow as Mike sighed. "Okay," he said breathing in deeply.

Had he said something wrong? "Mike," Will said, "Are you oka–"

"I love you." The words hit Will like a truck, flattening him and leaving his jaw dislocated from his mouth. He probably shouldn't have found this more surprising than when Mike had first kissed him, but not even Dustin's prophetic senses could have prepared him for this. Will gaped at him in shocked silence.

Mike saw Will's shock and decided to continue talking. "Look, I know that it's a big word, but I really mean it. And I know that we've only been 'official' or whatever for a week and it's kind of complicated and maybe I should have waited a little bit to say it, but–"

"Michael, shut up." Will said abruptly, causing Mike to close his mouth and wait in anticipation for what Will had to say. "I love you, too. I've loved you ever since that first day we met on the playground in second grade. You were amazing, beautiful, nerdy, and I've only fallen more in love with you since that day."

Mike, caught off guard, fumbled over his words in response. Although Will could tell that he was relieved. "Oh. Good. I've felt the same way. I mean, not about me. I mean, if those feelings were transferred over to you, so what I'm trying to say is I've loved you since then, too, if that makes se–" Will interrupted his stuttering boyfriend with another kiss on the lips, this one lasting much longer than the others. Mike cupped Will's face in his hand as the two of them enjoyed each other's lips and warmth.

When they finished, Will was practically lying on top of Mike. He made himself comfy, snuggling with him. “I love you, Mike Wheeler.”

Mike smiled, kissing the top of Will’s head. “I love you, Will Byers.”

Will knew that there would still be problems. Whether it be from Troy, a nosy teacher, close-minded family members, or anyone else, they were bound to run into problems at school and beyond. But for the time being, Will didn’t care about any of that. With Mike by his side, he felt stronger than he had ever felt in his entire life. No matter what challenges that would plague them later in life, he knew that they would face them: together.

Notes for the Chapter:

> The End! I really hope you all enjoyed this story, I really enjoyed making it. Sorry if there are any errors in this, I just really wanted to get this final chapter out!! I'm planning on making another ST fic eventually, although it won't by Byeler focused. Regardless, I will always look back on this one with fond memories. Ciao! :)